

MR. CUSHING *and*
M^{lle}. DU CHASTEL

FRANCES RUMSEY

Exquisite and Sophisticated Novel

BY LEWIS GALANTIERE.

CERTAINLY it were little enough to say of "MR. CUSHING AND Mlle. DU CHASTEL," by Frances Rumsey [Lane] that, considered purely as a novel, by which I mean that which the French so accurately term a roman, it was the finest product of the literary year of 1917. And there are those among us who will feel this book to be the most interesting revelation of a certain stratum of French society that has been made in the years intervening since Henry James wrote so delicately and so feelingly of the ladies and gentlemen of France. Many of those characteristics which W. C. Brownell, with his unparalleled sympathy and insight, interpreted in "French Traits" are illustrated in the person of the composite French aristocrat known here by the beautiful name of Anne-Marie du Chastel.

The story is of the marriage, divorce, and reconciliation of Paul Cushing, an American of wealth and position, endowed with all those virtues upon which we have come to look as peculiarly Anglo-Saxon, modesty, generosity, sincerity, integrity, and Anne-Marie du Chastel, a young Frenchwoman of the type universally aped in France by the soi-disant royalists, aristocratic in every act, thought, and reaction that the term implies. And the essential wisdom, the truth and the beauty of the novel, lies in the unrelenting elaboration of their racial antagonism.

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Racial Points, Keynote.

"THE irritating persistence of some of her French habits." It is in this line that we have the keynote of the story and its raison d'être. On his side Cushing found it increasingly unbearable to observe her "sense of effect," to note the fashion in which she carefully attired her mind, as well as herself, in preparation for each event. One remembers, for example, that on the occasion of the burial of her guardian, Miss Morrow, "the most lenient spectator would have been unable to separate Anne-Marie's tears from her

careful sense of fashion and from her concern as to the way in which her crêpe veil should fall from her shoulders. . . . He had been unable to escape from his persistent astonishment at his wife's capacity to be overcome by the sadness of death and yet to treat it as the most social of occasions."

And, for her part, it was her very "sense of effect" that made her life in America with Cushing so difficult. To Arthur Irish, a younger Pierpont

Morgan in his connoisseurship and his rare love and appreciation of objets d'art, the one American whose nature she found sympathetic to her own, Anne-Marie was able to express herself about America. "You do not see facts. That is the reason you have no form—no sense of definition. . . . Ah, but how it can make one suffer—your indirectness, your lack of definition"

* *

Divergence of Views.

IT is here that the point of divergence between two classes of readers occurs. I, who have a Gallic strain in me, was constrained to pity poor, transplanted Anne-Marie du Chastel. And yet it was no great surprise to me that such an Englishman as John Cowper Powys, than whom I know no more intelligent lover of France and the French, should have been able to tell me, upon reading the book, that he was unable to sympathize with Anne-Marie and looked with no small contempt and despolion upon her tale-bearing to Arthur Irish.

The author's viewpoint, if I may venture a supposition, seems to me to proceed from the same direction. And I say this despite my appreciation of her interesting and quite extraordinary aloofness. Except as displayed in certain of the novels of Joseph Conrad, I do not recall a contemporary author who has so successfully maintained the impartial attitude of the lookeron as has Frances Rumsey in the composition of this novel. Writing in the manner of Henry James, she has consistently refused to employ his frequent expression of affection for a particular character, she has never permitted

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herself to diffuse that glow of what, for want of a better word, I must call humanness, so appreciably patent in the work of her master. It is this impersonal quality, this finely bred reticence, curious paradox! that has made me feel this novel more closely to approximate the aesthetic beauty of Henry James than even the work of Miss Sidgwick or Mrs. Wharton.

When I have said this, I have indicated something of the beauty of her writing. Is this a first novel? I cannot say. Certainly, it is a novel of astonishing completeness, polished, finished, soigné, to a degree that has made its reading a real delight and its discovery a matter for pride.

Irene Dwen Andrews

April 22-1918

MR. CUSHING AND
MLLE. DU CHASTEL

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BY
FRANCES RUMSEY

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BOOK I

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MR. CUSHING AND M^{lle}. DU CHASTEL

I

SHALL not sail just yet. Remain for important reasons. Am engaged to be married to Anne-Marie du Chastel."

Cushing had composed the telegraphic message more than once, during the afternoon. But when he found himself standing at the long desk in the post office in the rue des Capucines, what he had to say fitted best into this brief statement, and he wrote it unhesitatingly and put at the head of it his sister's name and her New York address. It had been part of his unquestioning confidence that she would suit her reception of his news to her knowledge of the deeper qualities in him which had brought it about. Yet the significance which attached to his despatch of the telegram struck him; and the fact that once it was sent even his last unavowed hesitation would have ended stirred anew his sense of all which underlay the apparent at such a point of departure.

It had been as he walked to the post office, through the crowded streets in which the afternoon radiance of Paris hung like a diffused golden light, that he had begun to go over the history not only of the events but of the hopes

and desires which had led to his present situation. He had been amongst customs, it was true, which treated the personal element so briefly and privately that it scarcely seemed to exist. But it had none the less been his sense of a romance which was culminated when, one evening a week before, he had caught, across the width of a crowded room, the look in Mademoiselle du Chastel's face which was evidently waiting to greet the look in his.

Cushing had reached half way between thirty and forty without dwelling on his inner and imaginative needs but with a strong sense of their existence. In a country where the classifications are intuitive, the way to the modern survival of the old aristocracy of rigour from which he derived is still closely barred; and he was aware that with the radical American spirit he had inherited demands all the more definite in that they were impalpable. He had liked to think that in spite of the changes of the day some of the austerities of the young nation kept alive in this spiritual form, as he liked to think that the old national sense of a high purpose had become personal. In spite of its cleverness, he knew that the modern type of American was both too imitative and too fluid; and it seemed to him as much part of the special quality which separated him from it as his long limbs, his stoop and his quick smile that there should still exist in him something of this romantic sense of the idealist.

Although he had often had a faint sense of amusement at this sentiment, he knew that it took practical forms and that it had not been only his natural indifference which had kept him unmarried. He had never lost the idea of something final and absolute in marriage,

something definitely separate from all fugitive contacts. If he had lived with the freedom of a man with enough fortune to come and go as he pleased, he had at the same time had a half-formed purpose of reserving his deepest response for a feeling which should claim the best loyalties he was capable of giving. It had been *Mlle*. du Chastel's first charm for him that she was not only young and lovely, but that with her air of being almost more than a person—a slow, elaborate design, of infinite intricacy—she had promised to exact from him all that he would want her to exact. After their slight friendship—so slight that in a world which placed its emphasis more blatantly it would scarcely have existed—her brief admission to him, in her single look, of what her answer to his suit would be, had served to remind him of the wealth such reticence could conceal. In their few meetings she had taught him the most subtle manifestations of response; and though he knew her so little, the sense that, with each step, he would find more in her to know, had already made his feeling for her extend to the widest perspectives.

He had continued to stand, with the telegraph blank under his hand and his eyes absently passing over the shifting figures which crossed and recrossed the long room. He was always keenly alive to the vivid personality of a French crowd. But his thoughts were fixed upon a central point, and amongst the people who came and went between the wire windows and the long shelf which served as a desk, none detached himself with any special appeal to his interest. It was not for some seconds that he was aware that a lady who had come from the postal grating with her hands full of stamps

and letters and who was now beginning, only a few feet from where he stood, to sort out her correspondence, had, as absently as he looked at her, looked back at him, and had then abruptly paused in her task.

Cushing had travelled too constantly and in too well-beaten a track not to be prepared for the chance, anywhere in Europe, of unexpected meetings. But almost before his realisation of his surprise he was ironically aware that the lack of any visible perturbation, in his compatriot or in himself, was what marked the extent to which the surprise of each must extend. The lady, indeed, hesitated for a moment more, and then held out her hand.

"Of all extraordinary things——! Or do you believe in the fatality of the extraordinary?" She ended her exclamation with the question reflected in the charm of her irregular face. "So you're here!"

"It's much more to the point," Cushing smiled back, "that you are! I hadn't the least idea you were in Paris."

"Of course I'm in Paris. Every one is, every spring. Even you, my dear Paul, who obstinately do what you want while all the rest of us do what we must—even you are here, you see."

"You've come from home?"

"Yes—I suppose so." Mrs. Herring turned her bright head with a restless movement which matched the exaggerated tilt of the feather in her hat and the size of the rings on her bare hand. "If you want to be technical there's no place which gives me the sense of home—even when I leave it; and leaving makes one sentimental." She raised her eyes to his. "Edith's not with you?"

"No, I'm alone. I've been endlessly busy, seeing foreign clients, seeing friends——"

She took him up quickly. "And not seeing me? Oh, I know you too well. You never avoid people; you merely don't take the trouble to look for them." Her glance met his again, with a light amusement. "I've my information about you; I hear things, from time to time. And you? Do you ever have information about me?"

"I've any information you'll let me have, my dear Geraldine——" he was beginning, but she interposed, with the challenge of her tone changed to a sudden impatience.

"No, you haven't. What nonsense! As if you cared for an instant either for information about me or whether I'd let you have it or not. For the matter of that, as if I cared whether you have it or not! Heavens, and at the rate at which we all live!—a thousand miles to-day from where we were yesterday. How ridiculous if we did spend our lives looking over our shoulders——!" She turned back to the desk and began to attach the stamps to her letters. "And yet there's where men are so much better off than women. If you hear reports about me, you scarcely register them. If I hear reports about you, my woman's curiosity, as they say here, intrigues me." She turned abruptly and again she confronted him. "I hear—let's put it tactfully—that you've got plans for yourself."

Cushing laughed. "I wish you'd share your information with me, then. It's one of my complaints against myself that I seldom bother with plans, with expectations, with causes and effects. A humiliating admission for a lawyer, isn't it——?" He hesitated, struck by

something in his companion's attitude. He could not have defined the feeling of unease it gave him, but there ran through its studied detachment a suggestion which he could only name as one of antagonism, the less deniable in that it was carefully veiled. The impression was vivid enough to put him on his guard, and he made his own tone scrupulously impartial as he continued. "But if there were anything concerning me which it would interest you to hear—and granting that it belonged to the class of things permissible to tell——"

Mrs. Herring waited for an appreciable moment, and then she made an impatient gesture, which seemed definitely to dispose of the superficial significance of what he said. "I heard that last week you were in London—that you'd dined at the embassy."

"It's there, then, that you had news of me!" Cushing kept his voice light and easy. "It's one of the disadvantages of having cousins in diplomacy that one can't escape them. I've run over, once or twice, for the inside of a week, but I've scarcely seen my friends. I've seen only the ladies our ambassadress ordered me to take in to dinner."

Mrs. Herring was again silent. Her eyes, Cushing noticed, did not shift from the desk in front of her; and following their direction he saw that they were steadily set on the telegraph blank which lay beneath his hand.

His instinctive feeling, as he realised the direction of her look, was one of unreasoning annoyance. The fact that she could easily read the message he had written his sister mattered no more than the rumours she heard concerning him. She could not hold him accountable

for the smallest breach of courtesy; he remembered that the evening before, when he had gone over the letters he would write, when his engagement was formally announced, he had planned to write one of the first of them to her, and as soon as the proper time arrived he would fulfil his resolution. The persistency of her gaze and of her questions had the faint suggestion of a claim on his interest; yet he had never been more honestly clear in his palliation of his conduct where she had been concerned. Even in looking back, at recollections which had the same unsubstantial quality as her talk and the varying phases of her curiosity, he could remember that, in the large sense of the words, he had been as considerate and as decent as possible. Mrs. Herring had been free, she had been experienced enough to know her own mind, and Cushing had been plainly aware that before he had known her she had asserted the independence which it was her constant habit to proclaim. He had ceased to see her entirely at her request; and it had made his memories the more evanescent that where he had had his regrets concerning a piece of folly he could scarcely be proud of, she had been so plainly and consistently indifferent.

Yet as her pause deepened and prolonged itself, Cushing felt himself dominated by a swift touch of pity. He could not be fatuous enough to believe that he had retained a place in so agitated a life, whose reason for existence, as he had often sardonically thought, was merely seasonal. His impatience now was rather with himself, for ignoring the less obvious and truer significances which might underlie their meeting. He ought to have remembered not only that Mrs. Herring was

never what she seemed but never what she tried to be. He knew that it was one of her most difficult qualities that she instinctively submerged her real self in the intricacies of her manner; and as he examined her face more closely, he fancied that he saw in it the slight traces of feeling. It was plainly incongruous to attempt to match the idea of any sentiment with so exaggerated a charm as hers. But the suggestion was apparent enough to make him flush, under the pressure of deeper recollections.

"You've always been so extraordinarily nice about taking an interest in my useless affairs; and as soon as there's anything to tell about them, be sure that I'll ask for the sympathy and kindness you've so generously given me."

The glance she turned to him slowly deepened to gravity. "All I mean is that there, in London, I understood that your plans were definite. Your cousins told me, of course unofficially, that your engagement would shortly be announced."

Cushing felt his flush rise again; not, as he realised, because of the necessary admission of his own projects but because of his growing surprise. Yet her visible commotion was still so contradictory to her otherwise smooth exterior that he hesitated again. "I'd planned to let you know. I want you to be sure of that. And above all I want you to be sure that I value your wanting to know."

Though there was not the slightest tremor in her half-averted face, the flash of feeling which for a moment lit it seemed to give him a glimpse not only of the way in which she was now affected but of a process of change

which, in the months since they had met, must have been constantly affecting her.

"That's nice of you. I, you know, was never the nice one!" She was motionless for a moment more. Then she abruptly gathered up her letters and held out her hand. "I understand. I hope you'll be happy. I really hope it, I mean. I think I hope it more than I hope anything else." Her face changed again, and she glanced at the clock above them. "Heavens, what an hour it is! And I'm due at the Ritz! Wouldn't you know, wherever and however you met me, that I'd always be due at the Ritz?" She gave him a quick smile, and a moment later she had passed out of the doorway.

II

CUSHING made his way down the darker street, to where the rue de la Paix spread a transverse shaft of coloured sunlight, and hailed a motor cab, and in a few moments more he was passing between the bright tints of the lower Tuileries gardens and towards the brighter expanse of river. The few moments' talk in the post office had left him an impression which was scarcely tangible. Yet his instinct of fair play was too acute not to make his thoughts revolve around and around the doubt of what Mrs. Herring had either betrayed or conveyed; and it was not until the tall grey houses on the other side of the river became plainly discernible that he was reminded that lately his own standard of what a woman's delicacy and perception could mean had insensibly shifted.

He had been in Europe enough to have made his distinctions between even the less obvious types of Parisians. But in the last few days, with his relation to Paris on the point of definite establishment, the actual transit from one part of the city to another had come to mean to him the transit to another world. It was not so much that these people were distinguished and intelligent as that they exacted new standards and untried discriminations—they made one see one's self, as he had had to admit, in the light of new perceptions. The tall old house in the rue de Bellechasse, before which he now stopped, had struck him as the symbol of a problem at once so elusive and so practical. He had come to have the sense, with a smile at his own suspicion of effects, that a certain effect led up to it. The gradual passage to a quieter quarter was followed by the gradual extension of the silence which underlay the superficial noises of the traffic; and in the sunny grey courtyard and in the grave architecture, whose ornament was so obscurely placed, as if what were beautiful needed no display, he felt that he had surprised something of the actual structure of the society which existed here.

He had been prepared to find that he was face to face with different customs, as he had been prepared for the fact that they would never be explained to him. Such ignorances as he showed were either disregarded or else gracefully taken for granted: he was sure that his sense of this would always underlie the simplest occurrences. Yet such obvious difficulties as his ignorances had not seemed to him more disturbing than the more obvious of the difficult relations he had had to establish, or than the interview, for instance, which he had had that morn-

ing with an old lawyer whose life had evidently been spent in the service of such traditions. He had found Maître Duclos in a shabby brown room, lined with books which were plainly objects of family piety rather than of learning, and ready to welcome him with every affability. Cushing was clearly able to see that this affability was only the outward sign of a point of view immutably sure of itself. Throughout the talk he felt himself regarded as nothing more than an alien; a generous one, perhaps, since he was ready to meet all the requirements of his future wife's relatives, but still a person with whom one dealt at arm's length. At some turn of the proceedings he had shown a flash of his own business astuteness; and the courtesy with which it was discounted and with which the exigencies of reason were made to give way to the exigencies of politeness was an added proof to him of the imperturbability of the older nation.

It had been his first experience with a man who had had a legal training like his own, and who might be supposed to follow his own processes of mind. Though he granted the wide difference between them, it had seemed to him a difference as recognisable, and therefore as safe, as the difference between the sharp, tasteless air of the houses in which he had lived and the air which pervaded the wide staircase which led to the apartment where he now turned his steps, and which seemed to have retained the aroma of successive generations. Upon people whose sense of life was so decorative and so alert—in a way, so purely visual—he felt that he could successfully impose the definiteness and breadth of his own views. It was rather in the large salon where he pres-

ently found himself, filled now with the slanting afternoon light, that he had had his most definite uncertainties. The idea had occurred to him before that he might have felt least sure of himself here not because of the strangeness of the room but because of its disturbingly familiar look, as if a touch of New York had by some incredible means found its way to the rue de Bellechasse.

He had paused in front of the fire when the servant who admitted him left to announce his name; and as his glance strayed around him, the remembrance of the hours he had spent here rose before him. At his father's early death he had succeeded to the management of the legal affairs of one of the oldest of their family friends, a lady who, many years before, had come to live in Paris and who was of the generation which regarded a knowledge of French customs and French prices as an understanding of the French character. Every spring when he stopped in Paris to see her, Cushing had been amused by the odd effect of Miss Morrow's persistent and unconscious Americanisms underneath her superficial assimilation of an older tradition. The result of her long residence in Paris struck him as scarcely less incongruous than the effect of the photographs of her American friends on the rich old mantels, and the books and miniatures whose tradition had been so obviously purchased. It had been because of the contrast between her and her ward, the young French girl who, each year, had appeared to greet him with a more shyly warm welcome and to see him go with a more charming regret, that Cushing had first realised the definiteness of the line drawn between the two nations. Miss Morrow, as he reflected, had done what she would never suspect; she had been

the means of warning him that in order to make the French like him it would be better to exaggerate his native view rather than to let it be dispelled in the first whiff of foreign air. He had made up his mind to accept what he did not know about the older race as he accepted the intricacy of their sentences and the dispassion of their tone. But whatever had won his suit, he was certain that in his refusal to concede the smallest of his own standpoints, or even of his own prejudices, he had found his strongest position.

Cushing had seldom felt more definitely in command of his own resources, and yet as he turned, in response to the opening of the door nearest him, he was aware of a sudden perturbation. It was not so much a sense of confusion as it was an instinctive regret that he was about to expose, for the first time, the depth of a feeling which had taken root in the inmost reticences of his nature. All his hopes had grouped themselves around Anne-Marie du Chastel's consent to marry him and he had seen in her the realisation of his most precious and delicate fancies; yet as he paused, before going forward to meet her, he found himself thinking how difficult it was to sacrifice the unimpaired charm of the secret and to exchange a hope which had been so privately maintained for a certainty which might after all not be as worth while.

He began directly he had taken the hand she held out to him.

"Of course you've heard from Miss Morrow that she and your cousins gave their consent to our marriage and that, to-day, I'm free to speak to you. But you must have understood all along that I cared for you."

She answered instantly. "Yes, of course I have understood. And it gives me all the happiness in the world to accept." She continued to look at him for a moment more, and then he was aware that she eased the situation by the smile which first quivered in her eyes and spread gradually to her lips. "But I have not seen you for all these days, while these arrangements have been in progress. How do you do?"

Cushing smiled back at her. "I don't manage these things as people manage here, I suppose; but I do beg you to believe that I've meant to be everything considerate, to do all in my power——"

Mademoiselle du Chastel raised her hand to interrupt him. "You have been charming—you have been only charming. Every one has said so—Miss Morrow, my relatives, every one. You could not have been more kind and more considerate. Come! Shall we sit down?" She turned, with her quick ease, to the sofa beside the fire.

Cushing had a deep sense of his relief. His great wish had been to conduct the matter with every concession on his side to the difference of nationality between them and to show his understanding of the fact that in such things the man was always on his ground and the woman not on hers—that it was after all his privilege to be generous. To have everything successfully arranged, even according to the complex French code, appeared to have dispelled the last barrier to his complete admission of his happiness; and yet, as he glanced at Mademoiselle du Chastel, in this nearer view, he was conscious that he had never felt her more of a stranger. She was looking at him with that combination of a smile with her cool dignity which reminded him again that her greatest

enchantment was always in her suggestion of reserve. It was a reserve warmed by sudden flashes and changes, and he had felt its charm so vividly that it was this, he remembered, which had first led him to apply the word enchanting to her and had shown him how far more rarely it could be employed than the word beautiful. Her face was remarkable for a quality beyond any perfection of line or tint—a light alertness of spirit and feeling, which one caught in the sharp angles of her cheek and nose, in the sensitive corners of her lips and in her bright, grave eyes, and which was the constant question of her dramatic eyebrows. He had never seen any one less restless and more alive; her peculiar brilliancy made her repose itself alive. She was pale, but something of this inner vitality warmed her skin, when she spoke, to the tint of old ivory. Her head was modelled to move easily and quickly, her hands to spread open and rise and fall. He had long ago noted the significance of her gestures, as if she placed in them an eloquence greater than in her words.

He roused himself to respond to the questions she was putting to him. "Oh, yes, I heard from Madame de Jobourg that she had no objections to offer—she was the last, wasn't she?—and this morning I saw the lawyer who acts for your family. It's all settled; even Miss Morrow feels that I haven't hurt the French susceptibilities——"

"Ah, dear Miss Morrow!" she exclaimed, with her smile deepening to meet his. "She has been so good! And now that I am to leave her, after all these years! But she recognises, of course, how fortunate it is for me."

"You're not afraid of America?"

"Nor you of France? You are large, but we—how shall I say it?—we are concentrated."

"Ah, yes, you're that!"

She continued smoothly. "We are also, I admit, very ignorant of what is outside of France; but, as you know, I have lived with Miss Morrow for so long that I have perhaps learned a little more of the world than most French girls. You will not consider that"—her eyebrows lifted quickly—"a disadvantage?"

Cushing restrained his impulse to smile. "But I've been so immensely glad, since your home is to be amongst Americans, that you've had some experience of us——"

Mademoiselle du Chastel took him up at once. "Miss Morrow has been everything most good to me, and her friends—they have always been charming," she hesitated; "but a young girl who is an outsider, who is very little more than a companion——"

"It hasn't always been so easy, has it?"

She sent a thoughtful look around the room, as if to summon before her the years she had passed there, and then turned back to him with a shrug. "It has not always been easy, no. You can see for yourself, I am sure, that my position was not without its difficulties. To be living in France, my own country, with a stranger, to whose kindness I owed everything—yes, everything—yet who was not of my own race or of my family—I will confess to you," she ended, with a light amusement in her eyes, "that it has made me more absolutely French than I should otherwise have been."

"But don't you know," Cushing paused to try to find how to express his meaning, "don't you know that it's just because of that that I've always so tremendously

admired you? Because you kept yourself separate and because you didn't lose the smallest part of your own quality and your own dignity? If France does that for its women——!"

"Then that was the reason? The reason, I mean," she flushed a little, "that, beyond our sympathy, you felt such a marriage would be wise and possible?"

"Oh, as for its being possible, it's part of our national conceit, I suppose, that we make possible whatever we want!"

"But how you say that!" She clasped her hands. "I too, I have observed it in you. You are the American of the true type, the very best type. And yet you did not want to marry an American woman?"

"I scarcely planned to fall in love or not to fall in love because of a matter of nationality!" Cushing hesitated in his turn and his face grew grave. "You represented all I could think a woman ought to be. It hasn't been only that I loved you"—the words seemed to him inadequate and trite compared to the press of his feelings behind them—"but that I so intensely sympathised with you—with the way you've lived and the way you've managed the circumstances in which you found yourself. I myself don't quite understand how it is; somehow when one cares as much as I've come to care for you one doesn't expect to stop to think of those things. But I've never been able to see you apart from them and they've seemed to me to run all through you—to be part of your very beauty."

She seemed to turn over the facts for a moment. "Yet you are so definitely one thing and I another; you are so definitely of your race and I of mine!"

Cushing put this aside. "Oh, what is left of those differences nowadays but a difference of training? We've all become more or less cosmopolitan. What does seem to me important is that you in your own way and I in mine have the same views about things and the same sympathies: we're at least alike," his smile showed again, "in differing from most of the people around us."

"You would not have wanted to marry a woman who had no sense—let us say, of fitness?" she asked.

"No more than you would have wanted to marry a man who didn't at least make an effort to live up to the responsibilities of life," he returned, again with some quality of tenderness behind the lightness of his tone.

"Perfectly!" she exclaimed. "*Parfaitement!*" It was her first French word, and as she pronounced it he found himself wondering if any interpolation of the foreign could have been more foreign than her scrupulous use of English. The years she had spent with Miss Morrow had taught her an English of clear perfection, with a wide, sensitive vocabulary, and her fine enunciation was heightened by her sharp, tingling accent. It had made her seem less strange to Cushing that she so freely used his own tongue; and yet he found, oddly enough, that at this moment the care which she had taken to do so reminded him of their difference.

It was like the difference of method between them, and for the first time he felt himself confronted by the fact of how wide that difference was. If Anne-Marie had been of his own race he knew what the order of events would have been. The sudden, awkward expression of their feelings would have been followed by an enthusiasm which admitted nothing else; and her treatment of the

situation was so genuinely formal that, though he was prepared for such forms, so much now stood behind them that he could not help thinking her unemotional. Her air of inaccessibility, as she sat upright in her cool white dress, reminded him of his secret amusement at the impossibilities of the French standpoint—at the long deliberations of her most distant relatives and the discreet impositions of the lawyer. He could only say to himself what he had recognised before; he would have to submit to these ways good-humouredly, and when they were married he would show her something of a clearer and simpler air.

During his silence he became aware, in some indefinable manner, that her attitude was gradually altering. Her glance had fallen and her hands, which she had clasped in her lap, began to intertwine restlessly. The change was so slight that he could not have described it. It was scarcely more palpable than the faint pink which was now steady in her clear cheeks. But she had somehow managed to remind him that she was defenceless and young, and that with a brief word she had signed herself away to important issues. Her loveliness had warmed, with a touch of intimacy which stirred and deepened his feeling. He was conscious of both their isolation and their nearness, in the wide, clear spaces of the room, with the fading sun striking fringes of light from the edges of her hair and the logs in the fire beside them burning down to a pale, silvery grey. In her very care to maintain the perfection of formality, he recognised that there must be a vivid consciousness of their relation. For the first time it occurred to him that if she had none of the

laxities of his race she implied all the deeper an understanding of what produced them.

His imagination was so struck by this undefined change that when he spoke it was in a deeper tone. "Of course you must realise what it's meant to me—to know you would marry me."

"Yes; I have understood, I have fancied——"

"And you; had you thought of me in that way for long? We always had something to draw us together, hadn't we? Even when you were still a child and I was just grown—that was the first time I saw you, I remember, when you had been living with Miss Morrow for only a year or so. I didn't see you again until you yourself were grown—I don't know how long it was. Perhaps you weren't here when I happened to go through Paris; but one Sunday about five years ago——"

"Ah, I too remember that! It was in the spring, and you and your sister came to luncheon." It seemed to him that the grave way in which she helped to establish the little past they had between them had an immense charm. "You talked about so many things, and I listened and felt very ignorant; I was not yet accustomed, you see," she added, "to that kind of conversation."

"I watched you across the table; that you don't remember."

"But yes; I do."

"Had you begun to like me then?"

Her colour perceptibly deepened. "Yes, I liked you; and each spring, when the Americans arrived, I used to wonder if you and Mrs. Sale would come. Sometimes you came unexpectedly, you know, without letting Miss Morrow know; and as I sat at the tea table on her day

at home, I used to listen for the names that were announced and wonder if I should hear yours."

"And I sat through the dullest tea parties," Cushing protested—"tea parties of stranded Americans, not only here but all over Paris, just for the pleasure of catching a glimpse of you——!"

"Ah, have they been dull, those parties!" She gave a quick sigh. "Some of Miss Morrow's friends puzzled me so—especially the young girls! They troubled about me very little, to be sure." Her shoulders rose. "A *protégée*—she is never of much importance."

"And didn't you know how unimportant you made them all seem?" Cushing caught himself up as if his tone verged on too great intimacy. "Then once I came in the late afternoon, and Miss Morrow went to her sitting room and left us to talk. It was a year ago last autumn. Do you remember that? We sat in the little drawing room and you gave me tea. You had been reading some book on America, and we discussed it." He held himself again. "I remember that you wore a blue dress, and I had never before thought you so lovely."

"Yes, I remember; but I remember perfectly."

"That was the last time until six weeks ago; and all this spring it has somehow been so strange and yet so definite. I don't know how it worked itself out; but that night, when I caught your eyes across the room——" He leaned towards her, trying to see her lowered face. "I felt, then, that we had so much more to say than we had ever said."

"Yes."

"I suppose that's the way with all the best things—one feels them before one can say them; and when we said

good-night I knew you understood as well as I what I wanted to say."

"Yes," she said again.

"The last people were leaving, and you were here, beside the fire——" He leaned still closer to her, with the sudden resolve to kiss her. "Anne-Marie," he lingered on the syllables of her name, "if you knew what it means to me!"

She shrank back in her seat and he heard her murmur quickly: "Yes, and to me. I had always hoped—but it was what I had always so immensely counted on, that you would want to marry me."

Something in Cushing was astonished to the point of holding him motionless; and before he could make out what implication in her words seemed so surprising, he became aware that she was no less astonished than he. In his pause and in the suspense of his attitude she evidently found an inexplicable delay of what she expected of him. Her eyes met his, with a bewildered look, and for a moment their first kiss hovered in an uncertainty.

III

YOU must be beginning by now, my dear boy, to see all that I see in them."

As Cushing took his seat beside her tea table, Miss Morrow had made the exclamation in an undertone; but he had been conscious all afternoon that as each new group of people came in she had sent him an assurance, across the press in the two long salons, that this was the very best that Paris had to offer.

The few weeks since the announcement of his engagement had shown him enough to make him sure that Miss Morrow herself did not always succeed so well in gathering together the people whom she wanted. It had struck Cushing's humour that he could ascribe their presence only to himself. For years she had seemed to him one of that class of his countrywomen who pursue a country as they pursue a concrete enthusiasm. She had grown up under the influence of ideas which exaggerated the value of the imported, and he could see that Paris had long since ceased in her eyes to be a city and had become a paradise. Yet Cushing had never felt more keenly than to-day the quality which made her pathos. She had never seemed to him more restless and more eager, with her near-sighted eyes more nervously inquisitive, and more completely unaware both of the difficulty of absorbing her surroundings and of their absorbing her.

He could fancy that years ago, when she had first arrived, amiable and eccentric, with her obviously large fortune and her excellent introductions, the ladies who were now disposed about the rooms must have come to see her with their perfect politeness veiling their curiosity. They had probably been interested in the sum of her income, her furniture, her servants, and in all the categorical features of her life rather than in her desire to educate herself in their ways. Indeed it seemed to mark the difference between her and them that they should have regarded her merely as a practical object rather than as an intelligence. If Miss Morrow had been more finally detached from her own nation, he could see that for their own reasons they would have continued

to come. But she had not been able to lose her acuteness and her distrust of imposition as she had lost, she declared to him, her ability to figure in American money, and there was consequently a point beyond which she would not go in her subscriptions to *bazars de charité* and *oeuvres*. There appeared to be a reason no less practical for the presence of this special society to-day; he could understand that as he was about to assume however slight a connection with them, its members wished to observe him and to see how he stood the tests which they regarded as important.

One of the reasons of Cushing's astonishment was that there was so little suggestion of like or dislike in this scrutiny. It was plain to him that Anne-Marie's relatives and their friends did not question his character any more than they questioned his correct though difficult French, and that their observation settled upon the facts that they had heard that he had inherited a handsome income, to which he was yearly adding, that his tailor was obviously an excellent English one and his ease an ease which was not acquired but inherited. Cushing had never consciously cultivated a manner, but he had had to school himself at an early age to deal with people, and he had never been surer than this afternoon that his somewhat indifferent courtesy, lit every now and then by a flash of directness and acumen, made its effect when he wanted it to.

He was keenly aware of the pleasure this gave him. It was something to have Anne-Marie's good fortune admitted and to feel that he had to a certain extent imposed himself upon people so inimical to strangers. He had expected to find them very much what they were—with

manners both charming and frank and minds which one inevitably knew were oblique. The men who had come to what was in the nature of an informal reception before the signing of the *Contrat*, were as delightful but as ineffectual as his own standards had promised to show them. Their superficial geniality was so much more than that to which he was accustomed that he found it difficult to accept seriously, since the elaborate usually meant to him the insincere, and the only one he could place at all was the one who had had the broadening experience of marrying an American wife. The women too he could have sketched in advance; they were for the most part faded, middle-aged, and a little worn, though here and there he saw younger ones who led the broader form of Parisian life and had their names in the papers otherwise than as a formal chronicle of their *déplacements*. It was part of their curious mixture of the elusive with the definite that they should all imply—the most blatant as well as the most obscure—that they stood for criteria as delicate as they were implacable, and which had the same distinction as the distinction with which Anne-Marie's head rose from her thin throat. He had amplified his first lessons, and he knew better than he had known a month ago that his chief surprise in these people was their power not only to surprise one but to affect one; and what was to impress him most, in the course of the afternoon, was that there was some quality in all of them which made their good opinion rarely valuable.

Beside him his hostess, in the relaxation which followed so successful an introduction of him to the Faubourg, had passed from her exclamations of satisfaction to what interested him more intimately. There were only

half a dozen people left and they were grouped across the room around Anne-Marie, with their voices simultaneously rising in the French inflexion.

"Wouldn't one know, to look at her, that it's the best blood in France? Her father, René du Chastel—of course I never saw him, but they say he had the greatest air. And her mother was born a Pontalis, remember, and her grandmother on the father's side a Maupertuis. One of the grand-uncles, a Maupertuis too, is a Cardinal. It's a line—it's something that really counts. One can't live with it and not feel that; and to think that after all these years I'm to lose her——"

"It's been how long that she has lived with you?"

"Thirteen years, almost without a break; it was thirteen years ago last June that I first saw her at Maud du Chastel's, and a few days later it was all settled and she was here."

"Yes?" said Cushing tentatively; he had joined her in the corner with the request that, for his benefit, she should once more go over a story of which he had always been vaguely aware but whose sequences had now assumed an intimate interest.

"It was just after Maud was married," pursued Miss Morrow, with her tone falling to the sentimental note of reminiscence. "Of course I myself had been here for years, but she and her husband, Guy du Chastel, had only just arrived from New York to settle here. I had been asked to keep track of Maud—it's not so easy for an American to meet her French husband's relatives—and as her mother was both my cousin and one of my oldest friends, of course I was anxious to do my best. Then, just as the poor child was getting into her apart-

ment and had everything on her hands, this tragedy took place. Her husband's brother, René, and his wife were stricken with a low fever, and within a few days of each other they were both dead; and they'd left behind them this little daughter of ten, with no woman nearer her than her young American aunt, whom she scarcely knew. It's odd, isn't it? but as a nation we do seem to have a faculty of stepping in at the hopeless moments." Cushing had often noticed that when it came to what was final and important she had an unconscious reversion to her own loyalties, and at such times it appeared to her that all people were ultimately American if they were ultimately sane.

"I can never forget that day," she went on, "nor the look of that poor deserted child. I had dropped in to tea, and they sent for her to come to the drawing room—Maud was kindness itself and had brought her home after the second funeral. It was incredibly sad. There was no money, or practically none; the father had had heavy losses and worse debts, and the only members of his wife's family were distant cousins with nothing but their names to live on. There was only one way out of it, and that was for Maud to take Anne-Marie and bring her up. I remember we all acknowledged it, while the poor mite sat between us, in her black dress, and looked from one to the other of us with her frightened eyes. Ah, I must have told you before now that it's Anne-Marie herself who makes me remember that day so vividly. There was something so strangely mature in the way she resigned herself—the way she seemed content to wait for us to decide what was to become of her. She was rather ugly then; her skin was too dark and her eyes too large.

But the way she moved—the way she held herself——! I said to myself the moment I laid eyes on her,” she ended, “that she was a personality.”

Cushing nodded in silence. He was remembering that Mademoiselle du Chastel had once said to him, with a light amusement, and in one of those brief instants aside which had been the foundation of his knowledge of her, that it would have been far more sympathetic to her if Miss Morrow had been willing to accept her as a mere waif.

“Well, I came home and thought it over. I knew I mustn’t act on impulse, but the child haunted me. I suppose I was moved, too, by a sympathy for Maud, who was unused to French ways and had her hands full enough of her own problems. But that wasn’t what decided me. The truth is,” she put it with all its romance, “that I had to do it. I could no more have lost the chance than I could have flown. If it was providential for her that we should happen upon each other, think what it was for me—a lonely woman who had begun to get old——”

“So you offered to assume the position of her guardian and to have her live with you? That was the way it worked out, wasn’t it? And her uncle and aunt were of course ready to accept.”

Miss Morrow hesitated. Her elaborately dressed white head was bent forward, and with her brow furrowed, and from behind her habitual glasses, Cushing could see that her look had fixed itself again upon the central figure in the group across the room.

“No—that wasn’t quite it. I can’t explain it to you—but she somehow made both Maud and me feel that,

though she knew it all depended on us, it was none the less she who decided she would accept. Oh, she was everything docile—everything the right sort of child would be. But when I'd told her what I wanted to do for her, she thought for a moment and then made a little bow and said: 'Mademoiselle, the circumstances in which I find myself of course make it impossible for me to refuse so great a kindness. I thank you with all my heart. I hope that I may satisfy you.'” She continued to search the object of her scrutiny. “It was charmingly done, of course. But then—and especially in such a mite of a thing—it was so extraordinarily reserved.”

Cushing nodded again, without comment. Miss Morrow's long foreign residence, he knew, had had little effect on the fact that she came of a generation highly susceptible to romance, and nothing could have pleased her taste better than the du Chastel story. He could see that the ending he had provided was just such a culmination as she had hoped for. His duty of attention to her investments had necessarily extended into more intimate matters, and each year when he came to Paris he had divined that he revived for her some of the indefinite enthusiasms of her youth and that if Anne-Marie represented France for her it was no less true that he represented her own country. Perhaps because she had had to exhibit him to foreign eyes, he had insensibly become the person who, in her estimation, showed an apotheosis of what America could do; and he could see that a marriage between him and her *protégée* had appeared to be the final one in a series of coincidences which proved her own good taste.

Yet the relationship which would end with Anne-

Marie's marriage had not perhaps been without its elements of uncertainty ; and Cushing thought, with a gleam of amusement, that it was probably by this means that his elderly friend had learned that one could not buy a country and bring it home to ornament one's drawing room. His glance had strayed across the room again as he mused, and suddenly he caught the rise of the eyes he was looking for, the slow widening of their lids, and then the depth of the message they returned to him. It had become a secret pleasure to him in the past weeks that his meetings with Mademoiselle du Chastel were so formal. No words could have been as expressive of her feeling as these unexpected revelations she gave of it—the swift pressure of her hand, the stir of her colour or the tribute of the happiness which lay like a light upon her face, as if she continually assured him that her reserve was merely the exaction of a good breeding which was strict and exquisite.

It had been by such slight signs that she had sketched for him her own view of the history of her life with Miss Morrow, and had made it appear like a delicate black-and-white in contrast to a too bright water colour. Cushing had had revealed to him the child she had been, prematurely sobered and self-contained, and the causes which had made her manner careful and her smile discreet. Her gratitude itself, he could guess, was so un-failing and so correct that it gave Miss Morrow the impression that it was not given as feeling but as due payment in the exchange between them. Since gratitude was a rule with people of old and long-formed courtesies, Anne-Marie proffered this response. It had been only when she admitted to him her relief that so artificial a

situation would soon be over, and her pleasure in the fact that she and her benefactress could now have a spontaneous relationship, that Cushing had measured both her worldly wisdom and her desire to be on close terms with a woman who had done her so great a kindness. He saw that she had been incapable of submerging the difficulties of her situation in a vague sentimentalism. In spite of Miss Morrow's generosity, and in spite of her thankfulness for it, she had evidently used her critical sense enough to realise that all women of middle-age had their enthusiasms, and that this was only one of the forms of an amiable eccentricity. On Miss Morrow's side, Cushing could see that the suspicion that Anne-Marie could baffle her had been strong enough to prevent her from following it up. Behind the barrier of her formal ways, her ward had yearly become stranger to her. If Miss Morrow could have opened the door which led to Anne-Marie's inner world, he knew that what would have surprised her most would have been the simplicity she found there. Anne-Marie's silences were perhaps partly due to the fact that she believed the older lady too ingenuous to share her impressions; and Cushing felt it all the more his privilege that she had shown him, step by step, a nature of such rich colours and such a high fastidiousness.

His imagination had worked on these hints as it had worked on all her reticences; and it now seemed one of the delightful signs of her comprehension that, even with the distance of the room between them, she should divine that he could no longer manage to be patient with Miss Morrow and that she should contrive to break up the

group around her. She came slowly across the room, with one of the last ladies left, and as she approached her look assured him that all this manipulation was for him alone.

"*Donc*, you have seen them all, so many people? What a number came! And here is one more—my cousin, Madame von Alfons, who has returned to Paris only to-day. *Chère Mimi*, at last I shall have the pleasure of presenting to you Mr. Cushing——"

The lady beside her turned from the tea table, where she had paused to speak to Miss Morrow, and bowed to Cushing. The last two hours had shown him so many strange faces that they now seemed more or less alike; but he was instantly aware, as he confronted Madame von Alfons, of an impulse to pause and to look at her again. She was the best of that type of which the afternoon had presented many variants but to which there had been no exceptions; what he saw at once, indeed, was that she was faintly like Anne-Marie, only thinner and older and with her ivory colour a deeper tone. There was some suggestion about her of what Anne-Marie might be in ten years—a product exceedingly delicate and exceedingly astute. This perhaps made her arresting interest; and yet he wondered whether there were not some more definite cause for his curiosity. He repeated her name; Anne-Marie and Miss Morrow had both mentioned her—he was clear as to that. She had been born a princess, a daughter of the head of Anne-Marie's mother's family, and she had married a Viennese Jew of fabulous wealth. All this he gradually pieced together, fitting the information both to the magnificence of the pearls she wore and to the severe simplicity of her walking dress. Miss Mor-

row had been all eagerness in receiving her; but it seemed to him that it was nevertheless she concerning whom that lady had hinted that there had been incredible scandals—incredible, but always subdued to the scrupulous French view of the conventional.

Anne-Marie was meanwhile explaining matters to him. "My cousin has a great interest in America, yes. She has travelled so much—but everywhere, to the east, the north, in her yacht. She once passed two months in New York, and she has been telling me all I shall find; have you not, Mimi?"

Madame von Alfons bent her smile on Cushing, and as he caught it some door in his memory opened. "You have been to America? But it's there, then, that I've seen you!"

"You have seen her?"

"I was sure of it at once; you won't remember, madame, but I know it."

"But how strange! You remember, Mimi?"

Madame von Alfons continued to look at Cushing, and it struck him with astonishment that for the quickest instant the cleverness and significance of her smile deepened, as if to assure him of something unspoken and private, before it resumed its immovable conventionality.

"*Mais non, monsieur,*" she responded, laying her hand affectionately on Anne-Marie's arm, "you are mistaken. We have never seen each other before. This is my first chance, too, to tell you of my happiness in my cousin's happiness; *j'en suis tellement contente, mais comme vous voyez, j'ai si peu d'anglais*——" and she turned the talk lightly to other things.

IV

CUSHING lay on his back, in the hottest hour of the June morning, and looked up through the interlaced branches of apple trees at the vivid sky.

He had not the acute perception of beauty which comes from a conscious development of appreciation, but there was none the less an irresistible tendency in him to live by beauty and to fit its outer manifestations to the forms of his inner sentiment. The special charm of this inner Normandy of broad white roads and grey villages, whose verdure had the richness of a country where hills rise within scent of the sea, had always appealed to him; and when the question had arisen as to where he should take Anne-Marie, after their marriage and before their departure for America, and they had decided to come here, the whole landscape, so sober and yet so brilliant, had opened out before him like a pale green flower of perfume and loveliness. Madame von Alfons had lent them her little farmhouse, which had originally been the cottage of a *garde-chasse* and which she had arranged for her use while her husband, a few kilometres distant, was in the glare of the Deauville races. Since it was perhaps consequent to so contradictory a reputation as hers that she should enjoy simplicity, she had kept the rooms empty of all except the necessary comforts, and their sombre Norman aspect was lightened only by the sun which flowed in from the garden and from the busy courtyard. The house stood unexpectedly in the midst of flat fields, with its face to the morning light and deep apple orchards behind it, and so far from the road that only the occa-

sional noise of a distant motor, on its way to the little group of villas which gathered at the edge of the sea, or the rumble of the heavy two-wheeled carts, as they passed from farm to farm, broke the tranquillity of the hours.

It was another evidence of the way in which Cushing's happiness affected him that he felt in himself the need to be alone. He had come out morning after morning and thrown himself on the grass, near enough to the house to hear the rise and fall of Anne-Marie's voice through the open windows, and with his thoughts idly passing from this sound up to the black branches and the luminous sky. It seemed to him that a certain need to detach one's self necessarily went with such a complete gratification of all one's desires, and that to close his eyes and enjoy the pictures behind them of what she was doing, as she moved to and fro in the little rooms, with the pale light falling on her and the fresh smell of the upturned earth of the garden in the air, was to feel her as near as if he actually perceived her.

He had learned, in the last morning, that when the sun rounded the bend of a particular branch and struck through a new mass of leaves, so that he had to pull his cap farther over his eyes, the pleasure of this lazy suspense ended in a deeper pleasure. The sound of her voice grew nearer, and he heard her light tread pass first over the threshold of the door at this end of the house, then over the glistening pebbles of the courtyard, and finally into the long orchard grass; and each morning he had found himself smiling at the sense of complete contentment with which he heard her approach. He had supposed that only to men who were younger or less direct

with themselves there could come this unreasoning belief in a feeling, as if it were the source and foundation of existence. Already his marriage had made him aware that what he had wanted was an incentive and an outlet for the latent life of the imagination. His greatest debt to Anne-Marie was the fact that she had made these hopes, in both their largest and their most intimate ways, seem so possible. The sense of the hidden values in his sentiment had never been stronger in him. It was not only a means by which he would extract from life the most precious and intimate happiness, but it was a widening and enlarging of all his perspectives.

The sound of Anne-Marie's feet in the grass paused beside him, and he felt her fresh hand laid against his cheek.

"My dear, I thought you had gone away from me—yes, forever! But you must have been here for an hour! I decided that you had abandoned me and that I should have to go back to Miss Morrow. Imagine! How horrible! How can you get through your tub and your dressing so early?"

"I make the stupendous effort in order to come out here and lie on my back on the grass and wonder how I am ever to live up to you."

"Live up to me! You talk as if I were a mind, a moral; come, Paul, am I anything but lovely?"

Cushing watched the play of the shadows across her face. "No matter how lovely you are I shall never forget that you're a mind and a moral, as you put it. It's due you that I shouldn't forget, and so I shan't."

"Ah, they make me shiver, minds and morals!" She threw up her hands with one of the extravagant gestures

with which, she seemed instinctively to know, he liked her to respond to his amused tenderness. "Or no; I do not want you to forget anything that is due me, but only to wish that you could forget. Yes? You understand?" Then, as she lowered herself carefully to the rug which he had pulled from under the tree for her, she held up a long ruffle of lace which dropped from her shoulder and asked soberly: "Did you ever see anything so beautiful?"

"Good heavens!" Cushing raised himself on his elbow. "What an incredible garment! A *peignoir*, isn't it? And how appropriate to wear under the trees—lace and silk and satin! I never saw anything so delightful!"

She was settling herself cautiously on her rug, with the constraint of a person who is uncomfortable in out-of-door surroundings, and when her eyes returned to him they were as serious as before. "Yes, it is perfect—*de toute beauté*. It is my best. I have dreamt of it—but I have dreamt of it since I was a child."

"You mean you planned it?"

"Ah, of course I planned it; but I dreamt too of all it would mean, of what it would stand for. When it came true, I knew I should be married, established. I knew it would mean that at last I had my own life. A *peignoir* like this"—she fingered the lace again—"it stands for a great deal."

"I admit that it has its implications, my dear."

She nodded gravely at his smile. "No, I am not blind to these things, as you are. It is wonderful to me that I am free, that I have the pleasures of independence, that I am alone with you here," she waved her hand, "that your money pays for me. I like it when the servants are respectful to me—ah, they are respectful to

rich people!—and when my maid comes for my orders. Miss Morrow once said that to notice such things was vulgar; dear Miss Morrow!” Her smile suddenly suffused her face. “But how young she is!”

Cushing watched her for a moment. With each step which he took into her character, if he had found something strange he had also found something delightful, as if a new set of perceptions must indeed be acquired in order to deal with her, but which had their reward in the revelation of her fine adjustments and her lovely possibilities. It had been something of a comedy to him to see that to Miss Morrow this recognition of marriage as the crucial experience, and Anne-Marie’s practical view of the superiority she would assume as a married woman, had reached a point of frankness which was indelicate. He himself had understood that to be so beautifully schooled to a correct appearance meant the very genius of the situation. It was somehow a result of the success with which she managed things that she should show him not only what she could give him but also his own capacity to respond to so naturally perfected an art. She could be restful and stimulating, uncertain and reassuring. Her very enthusiasm was the enthusiasm of a person of strict form and high elegance, and it was increased, even in their happiest moments, by her retention of her reticence, and all this with no more change in the smooth flow of his contentment than the tremulous light on the fresh grass marked a change in the steady gold of the sun.

His answer to his thoughts was to bend forward to draw her closer to him, but she slipped out of the restraint of his arm and motioned him back.

"No, I must ask you something. There is something I should like to know. Have you cared for many women?"

"My dear child," he hesitated; "what put such a question into your head?"

"Ah, but it is a reasonable question. We have been married for more than a month, and in another fortnight we start for *là-bas*, for the other side of the world. We cease to sit about on the grass like children; we begin to live. What do you think marriage is? For a woman, my dear, it is a very sensible affair; it is planned and ordered. I want to know what I have to confront."

Cushing smiled. "Well, then, no; I've not often cared for women."

"Why not? After all, my dear, you must admit that you have a rare charm; a definite, an unusual charm. Your distinction, your indifference, the way you use your nice hands, which are thin and brown—just as a man's hands should be—why not, then?"

"Because, if you want to know the truth, women have usually bored me."

"But how could they bore one!" she exclaimed.

"I don't know whether it was their fault or mine, I admit. But they bored me; so I waited for my real love affair to be you."

"You mean," she corrected him, "that you waited more or less."

"More or less." Cushing's shoulders rose and fell. "All men are sometimes fools, and I've been no exception."

"But did you never have a love affair with a woman for whom you cared?"

"No—I can't call it caring."

"Why not?"

"One doesn't always do those things," he hesitated again, "because one cares. Sometimes one does them from habit—sometimes from indifference."

"But how strange not to care!" she broke out. "If it were a person for whom one could care, I should think it would be so much more amusing. Ah, how extraordinary"—she drew back to get a better look at him—"always to be ashamed of one's self!"

"How extraordinary," he retorted affectionately, "not to have the standards which make one ashamed of one's self!"

She waited again for a moment, with her smile flickering as delicately as the sunlight on her face. "But no. I might have known it from your character. You Americans have not the vices of more developed people; and you, you probably go no further than the American form of vice—a wife. But suppose I do not want to be a vice?"

Cushing laid his hand on hers. "You mean you want me to understand that you're everything rare and wonderful? Oh, I don't suppose it's easy to make the adjustments women have to make. We're such stupid brutes——"

Her eyes opened. "But, on the contrary, those adjustments are exceedingly sensible. Of course I thought of such things before my marriage. Every young girl does. But you must remember the impeccable attitude which is demanded of us. Our innocence itself—that too is trained." She shook a twig carefully from her lap. "I knew what one has to deal with in all men; and I sus-

pected—I must do myself that credit—what I should have to deal with in you.”

Cushing was obscurely aware that it was the suggestion of her look which brought the blood to his own face. “In me!” he spoke gravely. “Then, my dear, you must have foreseen that you’d have to deal with every conceivable and possible loyalty.”

“Ah, yes, yes! That is true!” She smiled again. “I foresaw, too, that that would be your answer! That, I think, considering my lack of experience, was *assez adroite*! Men are not women, and it would be too foolish to deny it. And the reason that I ask you such questions is because, *voyez vous*, I am determined not to deny it.”

Cushing still kept his hand on hers. “It’s wonderful of you to be so understanding; yet I’d rather, I think, have you less understanding—I’d rather have you demand everything of me.”

“Ah, but, my dear, I do! I demand everything as I expect you to demand everything—to demand that I shall treat you with a perfect consideration, that I shall give you the children you want, that I shall found a family.”

“And yet you expect——”

“I expect everything!” she declared, yet the reservations of her face were persistent. “And at the same time I expect nothing. Come, Paul, be reasonable! I am talking the vaguest generalities. I do not do so for my own information—believe me, I am incapable of that vulgarity. I do it rather for yours.”

“For mine? But, my child, the information I want about you—the information I need—is the information I get from caring for you and having you care for me.”

"That is of course true; and yet I want you to know," she said clearly, "that—let us say that I am a little more human than your theory supposes one to be. Yes. You are charming to me, my dear; but so often, later in life, in certain conditions certain things have to arrange themselves; and I want you to know, if such a thing should ever happen——"

While he listened Cushing had been conscious of his inclination to smile. It was his instinctive way of disposing of the mental questions she raised. Yet something urged him to prove to her the point behind her suppositious generosity.

"I see! I keep forgetting that you've been brought up in ways which still seem to me fictional! It's you who are charming; at least, it's you who mean to be charming. But according to my code, you're not."

"I am not? I am not considerate? Ah, but lack of consideration——"

"It's what you most abhor; I know that. My view of consideration is that you haven't got to concede but to demand. I want you to be content with nothing short of the best. It'll be an imperfect best, so far as I go—that I'll admit. But I want you to expect it, to make me feel you expect it. Don't you see?" He paused for a moment and looked away from her, through the orchard, to the shining fields beyond. "The way to consummate a feeling like ours is to live up to it; and whatever one's mistakes—and, heavens knows, I've in my life made mistakes—there's one thing one can't let go, and that's the element of high spiritual distinction: the element," his eyes turned back to her, with a smile, "that you look like but that you don't always talk like."

"But that—that is pure imagination!"

"Pure imagination! But what's the fun of life without pure imagination?"

"I find it fun," she retorted, "and I am totally without pure imagination!"

"Totally; but it's enough, my dear angel, that you inspire it in me. When one's got the thing you've given me, the thing that's infinitely precious and rare——"

"So precious and rare," she spoke lightly, "that it does not have to be competently managed?"

She had risen as she spoke, and as her glance slanted down at Cushing he felt the slightest start of discomfort. It seemed to him that it had the kind of disconcerting astuteness which one found only in the child or in the person of a highly finished and profound maturity.

V

SEVERAL times Cushing had turned up and down the long drawing room, back from the accumulating autumn twilight which darkened the windows to the pools of amber lamp-light and the shifting glow of the fire.

His sister had telegraphed him that she would come to them directly from her train; and while he waited he was conscious for the first time of the protraction of his sense of suspense. He had understood the reasons which had prompted her to prolong until now the long western trip she had been making. It was like her instinctive generosity to give Anne-Marie time to accustom herself to America and to her new surroundings before taking up the more difficult problem of personal relations. Yet

the changes of the past two or three months had made him see more intimate reasons in this consideration. In spite of his close sense of family ties he had viewed them collectively rather than individually, and the affection which he had accepted from Mrs. Sale as a foregone conclusion had only lately begun to have its own lights and shadings.

Cushing and his sister had had to draw them together not only their affection and his admiration for her acute, dominant qualities, but also the fact that he had been the only person to share her private difficulties. He had never satisfactorily explained to himself the mischance of what had promised to be so brilliant a life or the reasons why a person of such keen intelligence should have committed the commonest of errors. He could only call it some fatal lack of discrimination that had allowed her to waste her rare promise in a marriage which had been a failure less tragic than trite and commonplace. The matter had been most inexplicable of all, he guessed, to Mrs. Sale herself. As he had watched the successive stages of the unhappy affair, he had imagined the galling difficulty she must experience in being tied for life, not to her mistake—since her divorce made that revocable—but to the consciousness of having committed it. She had done her best to be content, at first, as her brother divined, by insisting to herself that her husband was adequate, and later by not minding that he was not so; and when she was finally confronted by the gap between her ideal and Sale's neat inanity, there had been nothing for it but the most summary ending. Cushing was left with the sense that the history of the marriage, down to its final scene in a court room, verged upon travesty.

Its only practical result appeared to be the ungrammatical music-hall girl whose generousities gave his sister her freedom, and Sale had contaminated even its pathos with something of his own suggestion of caricature.

He had admired both the patience and the pluck with which, after her divorce, Mrs. Sale had set herself to reconstruct her interests. She had made herself an independent life, as she had insisted that she must have an independent home, and she had absorbed herself in the various activities of the day with some conspicuous success. If he could not always agree with her propaganda, it had touched the spring of Cushing's sympathies that when they applied to him all her ideas resumed an old-fashioned rigidity. There was ingrained in her a respect for the opinion of the man of her family, which marked him as an exception and exempt from general rules. He had indeed accused her of creating for him an ideal character, the slightest variation of whose opinion affected her. But he was none the less dependent upon a devotion so completely without a trace of petty reservation, and it had added to his sympathy that his sister had failed where he was confident of so signal a success.

He had never questioned the worth of what she meant to him and the assurance of how deep and affectionate an understanding. But it was perhaps the influence of contact with an alien standpoint that he should find, for the first time in his life, that his curiosity was stirred about his established relationships. He had ceased to accept as inevitable that to which he had become accustomed. All that he had taken for granted in his sister's case had lately appeared to him questionable. Her inter-

ests had seemed more forced, her attitude towards life more artificial, and her divorce less a matter of tragedy than of bad taste. Each time he now approached Anne-Marie's chair beside the fire, where she sat waiting with the peculiarly erect motionlessness which she found it so easy to maintain, he caught himself smiling at the idea of how perfectly her attitude expressed the persistent influence of her inexorable standards.

He and his wife had arrived in New York in the warmest part of an oppressive July; and after a week or so at his office, necessary after so protracted an absence, Cushing had taken her off, this time for a trip to the northwestern coast and through the Canadian Rockies. He had been aware that this constant travel kept Anne-Marie somewhat in the mental attitude of the tourist. Indeed, when they again reached New York she looked at its reviving autumn life with much the same dispassionate astonishment as she had looked at the wide flow of prairie from the windows of the train.

He had been prepared to have her dislike some of the conditions which confronted her and to grant the difficulty of the change from the mellowed brilliancy of Paris to the cruder brilliancy here. One could scarcely expect a person of her training to be interested in the underlying qualities which made that brilliancy so real—its energy, its originality, and the vigorous confidence with which it pursued its purposes. But what he had not foreseen was that she would be satisfied to accept her impressions as final and to let the matter go at that. The lack of a certain breadth of imagination in her carried her no farther than the facts that the climate was too stimulating and the streets undecorated and without

gaiety. Cushing had watched his countrywomen adapt themselves to the habits of life of various parts of Europe as easily as to its accents and its manners, and the perfection of his wife's unadaptability gave the strongest flavour to her own localisms.

His family had lived in New York for several generations, and always in an atmosphere of old-fashioned prejudices which varied as little as the contiguous brown houses of which theirs was one. Yet the fact that these prejudices had been definite and sustained had given him some sympathy for them, and he had come, as he explained to Anne-Marie, to have a certain tolerant friendliness for what stood out against any mere transiency of effect. "If you look in that way at all they left behind them, even these old things become so likable!" he said, when he was first showing her around his house. "My grandmother and my mother, I remember well, would never have anything but the very plainest and the very best. When one sees the pretentiousness of to-day one's grateful for such narrowness. Edith's never felt about it as I have; when she arranged her own house she gathered together all sorts of strange things—it's a kind of Americanised Miss Morrow's. You'll see! Any woman bred in New York considers all this too inexcusably provincial. But somehow I've always thought that it would be rather stupid if I changed it. When one has to look at such grotesque ornaments and such surprising twists and turns to the furniture, it's bad enough, I confess. The sudden and the fantastic seem to have been their only forms of humour, poor dears. But after all, it has its quality."

She had agreed, in her gravest way, and a moment later

she interrupted her silent appraisal to say: "Of course it is very middle class."

"Oh, Anne-Marie, you delicious creature!"

"Why? To admit one's class? But class is so obvious! One of my great-grandmothers was absolutely of the *bourgeois* type, absolutely. If you were an aristocrat like me, my dear, you would not mind your bourgeois blood."

"Oh, as for me, I rather like such stolidity; but if you accused an American woman of the same thing——! You see, we've a different scale here."

"Ah, yes. You are so tortuous, so inexact." She became thoughtful again, and then she made a wide gesture which seemed definitely to dispose of the sombre, upholstered interior. "But the undeniable thing is that your taste is correct here—or your sense of fitness. No, I have considered it carefully, and we must not change it. It is ugly—yes; but it has, as you say, its quality, it forms a consistent whole. It is the best American, the best New York. We must not forget that. It perfectly matches your traditions." Suddenly she had interrupted her evident appraisal and had wheeled around, her face suffused with amusement. "The dear place! But it is so naïve that it is shocking!"

"Oh, come, my child!" he had protested. "You shall make it whatever you please."

She closed the matter with one of the turns which so surprised him. "Not at all; it is not what I please. You are the person to make such decisions."

The fact that he could so little foresee even her concessions had struck Cushing as specially strange. She was less puzzling to him when her contradictions were

palpable and amusing than in the irrelevance of her surrenders to his point of view. He expected her to be young and self-imposing when she drew aside with the finest courtesy; he expected to see her laugh when she was obtuse and bored when she was amused. This discrepancy between her and his prediction appeared at first only another form of her variegated charm. Yet gradually he had begun to feel what fundamental views her light comments expressed, and that whatever arrangement she made to fit herself to her surroundings was not made because she was either sympathetic or indifferent but because of the politeness which she owed to him.

The sound of a motor stopping at the house broke in on his reflection. As he laid his hand on the door, ready to welcome his sister, his final glance around him seemed to give the touch of actuality to the changes which Mrs. Sale must see. Outwardly they were as elusive as the way in which the ugly old rooms had caught the infection of Anne-Marie's glow and—he could have fancied—the way in which they smiled lightly at the process of their initiation. The lace scarf here, the blue and gold folios there, the cushion for her feet, the brass jar which bloomed into yellow roses, the soft pinks and mauves of the autumn cosmos, which she had so carefully placed behind her habitual seat, were more suggestive of the Parisian elegance than of such a planned and decorative whole as his sister's own drawing room. The light trick of transformation was as inexplicable as the appearance his wife presented, as she turned expectantly from the fire to face the door. Alert and yet with her indisputable air of self-containment, she had none the less points in her face curiously at variance with each other. Her nose

tilted too sharply and in the uncertain light her skin was sallow. If she managed to give a definite impression of beauty, it was rather the beauty which comes from a carefully related and artistic whole. The light in her hair, the finish of her dress, the match between the colour of her hands and the gardenia with which she had caught up a fall of yellowish lace, were all equal parts of the composition. Every detail about her had the same loveliness, but it was a loveliness as minutely planned and fitting as closely together as the links of the little diamond bracelet which slipped over her wrist. The contradiction in his situation struck Cushing with sudden acuity. He knew less of his wife as he knew her better, and a closer view of her was only an elaboration of the extraordinary compound of her complexity and her simplicity.

Mrs. Sale had seated herself opposite Anne-Marie, at the outer edge of the illuminated circle the fire drew about the hearth, where the light fell becomingly upon her upright figure and on the definite lines of white in her black hair.

She began, with her quick ease, to tell them about her journey and about the lateness of the trains; and while he listened and returned the affectionate understanding of the smile she from time to time turned to him, Cushing had caught himself wondering how Anne-Marie's welcome would strike her. Nothing could have been less effusive, as he dryly observed, than its cordiality. He knew that it was one of the weaknesses of Mrs. Sale's type of self-confidence that if she were not convinced of the inerrancy of her judgments she was nevertheless con-

vinced of the inerrancy of her standards. By these Anne-Marie must until now have shown herself so amenable and self-effacing that he could fancy it must have been difficult to imagine her as different from what she had been in the rue de Bellechasse, where his sister had often seen her, and where she had been so ready to slip in or out of the drawing room, as Miss Morrow preferred. But in all that did not concern herself Mrs. Sale was sharply observant; and Cushing could see the inevitability of her conclusion that Anne-Marie's manner meant expression rather than feeling. While their talk extended over the events of the first months, their western trip, their return to New York and the latest news from Miss Morrow, his wife's light smile maintained a detachment which made progress increasingly difficult. Though his sister could try no subject to which she did not get a response, the response went no further than a polite exclamation, and he had to grant, ironic as it seemed, that there were moments when Anne-Marie was neither more nor less than dull.

Mrs. Sale had tried to turn from this somewhat strained interchange of generalities, and as she put down her tea cup she bent forward to lay her hand affectionately on the younger woman's. "If I could tell you how much all this means to me! In my own life it will make all the difference possible that Paul's settled and happy. You see I've debts that I too owe you!"

"Ah, you! But you are the woman whom of all others he thinks most wonderful!" Anne-Marie regarded her attentively. "He says you are so clever, so cultured; that you have such a talent for management! How can I be courageous enough to succeed you? And you know

so much—about music, about pictures, about everything. Music—ah, how superb it is, is it not? And then he so enormously admires the way you arrange your hair.”

Mrs. Sale turned to share Cushing’s laugh. But she had plainly determined to make her own position clear, and she lightly refused to let any such graciousness, even when it was introduced with this irrelevancy, obscure the issue. “I want you to like me, my dear, but I don’t want you to think me extraordinary—for I’m not; and I don’t want you, above all, to bother about me. There’s one privilege I reserve in turn, and that’s to let you alone. We’ll do things together, whenever you want; but we’ll try to make friends on an independent basis. That’s after all the sensible way, isn’t it?”

Anne-Marie’s response again suggested her faint surprise. She was evidently not impressed by a generosity of attitude because her own code saw no necessity for it. She thanked Mrs. Sale for her consideration. “I want to have you like me, above everything; ah, yes. But you must remember how little I know. You American women are so intelligent. I, too, I want to be intelligent; but I do not believe I shall ever accomplish it—no, Paul, have you not often warned me that I shall never accomplish it?” Her words trailed off, and all Cushing’s perceptions suddenly sprang to meet the message of the look she cast at him—a look which was like a visible pulsation of the current of feeling between them. A second later she had reverted, with all her ease, to Mrs. Sale. “But you are not going? Ah, it was so infinitely good of you to come at once, to give us even this glimpse of you, on your way from the station.”

Mrs. Sale rose and drew her furs around her shoulders.

Cushing noticed the silent appraisal of the look with which her eyes rested on the size and lustre of the pearls around Anne-Marie's throat. She then turned to give him another smile, and pressed his hand. "Well, if you continue to succeed with Paul as you've already succeeded you'll have accomplished enough! Only remember that I beg for all the time you can spare me. I'm alone at home so much—busy people always are; and whenever you can run in——"

Anne-Marie's eyes rested on hers with a grave attention. "But this winter, as I understand, you will have a friend more or less with you. My cousin Madame von Alfons saw a lady in Paris, a few months ago, who said she would be constantly visiting you during the winter. She has, I believe, no *pied-à-terre* of her own. Mimi told me of it; her name, I think, is Mrs. Herring."

"Geraldine? Yes, I did write her, to Paris, to make her headquarters with me;" Mrs. Sale again confronted Cushing, as she replied; and it struck him for a perceptible instant that she was arrested, as he was, by the indescribably light implications in Anne-Marie's tone. "Did you know, Paul—did I write you of it?"

Cushing took the time to return her look fully. "No; but I'm exceedingly glad. Edith's one fault, you see," he turned to Anne-Marie, "is that she's not amused except by the serious; and Geraldine has known her long enough to rouse her out of any apathy——" His eyes now held his wife's, and again in the same elusive way, he felt as if there took place between all three of them an exchange of swift but undeniable meaning.

"But what a privilege such a friend must be!" Anne-Marie spoke with the most assured lightness. "Yet you

will remember, my dear Edith, will you not? that one's friends are not one's family, and you will let Paul and me come to you constantly—yes? And about the things Miss Morrow and I selected in Paris for you; if you knew my uncertainty about one of the wraps!"

VI

WHEN Cushing came back to the drawing room, after bidding his sister good-bye, he saw that Anne-Marie had risen and stood looking down into the wood fire. It was one of her habits of meditation to stand with her elbow on the mantel and her eyes bent on the spirals of slowly ascending smoke. He was so fast becoming sensitive to her briefest mood that he felt at once something unusual in her air. Yet he was none the less conscious that, for the first time, he paused before going forward to draw her to him.

"You're tired?"

"No, no. How charming Edith is; and how charming she was to me! All the praises you gave her—but they were not nearly enough. She has such distinction—such a special quality." She turned to face him and she continued to look directly at him, as if she were sure he would understand that these preliminaries were merely a sign of her constant observance of good form. "But there is something I want to say to you. I want to ask you if you still feel as you felt when we talked it over in Normandy—I mean, if you still feel as you felt," she ended, "where the question of other women is concerned."

Cushing had kept his eyes steadily on her as she

spoke. The perfection of her ease, as well as the impermeable assurance of her glance, had not obscured the issue for him, as they might have obscured it when he understood her less well, or lessened his sense of the definite direction she was pursuing. With a quick reversion of thought he compared her attitude now with her former attitude—an attitude which, in spite of the suspicion he had already had of the depth of hidden causes in her, had been in so many ways young and pliant.

"Dear Anne-Marie, what have such things got to do with you?"

"But that is just what I want to know," she said easily.

"I don't understand; you want to know exactly what? You want to know if every smallest part of my life is given to you? But it's too absurd!" He broke into impatience. "You know too well the way I care. It's a thing not to be said but to be felt."

"Ah, but you see that I distrust them, those things which are easier to feel than to say! What I want to know—what, you will understand, in my position as your wife I must know—" she pursued steadily—"is whether you seriously meant what you said."

Cushing shrugged his shoulders. "If you require explanations, I suppose I must give them. It seems to me unnecessary to dignify such suggestions by talking of them; and how they could ever affect you——"

"My dear Paul, nothing has affected me. I knew very well when we married that nothing existed which could affect me." Her face had sharpened to an even closer attention. "I knew that you would not have married unless you had been definitely free."

"Definitely free——!" He broke off. "But don't you understand that if I hadn't been, or if there had been the smallest reservation worth telling, I should have told you?"

She took him up quickly. "You would have told me what?"

"What existed, naturally enough; except that it would have seemed so intrusive, so crass, to burden you even with denials. Does one always need to deny?" He spread out his hands. "Can't you see for yourself?"

She smiled slightly. "I see one thing, and that is that during the winter you and Mrs. Herring will frequently meet."

Cushing was silent for a second; he felt scarcely able, as he waited, to distinguish between his astonishment and his resentment. "And do you think it's fair to attempt to revive, even by mentioning it, something which every hour you've lived with me must have proved to you has long since ceased to exist? Who gave you such ideas—what gave you such ideas?"

"If you call them ideas——!" She smiled again. "Well, then, Mimi gave them to me."

Cushing's thoughts flew back. "Madame von Alfons! And she had heard——"

"Yes; what one generally hears in such cases. She was in America—that year."

"And when she was in America——"

"She had chanced to see you together. It was very simple." She put it with her usual brevity. "Such situations are scarcely things to be concealed, when one has Mimi's perceptions."

"And what earthly business had your cousin not to trust me to manage my own affairs?"

Anne-Marie's eyebrows deprecated his tone. "Since they were about to become my affairs, and since you were a stranger to us all——"

"Then do I understand that she did you the kindness, and me the insult, to warn you?"

"She merely told me what people knew had existed between you and Mrs. Herring. Surely it is not a matter about which to become so violent! It seems to me so much easier to admit those things, and such a saving of trouble."

"And you and she supposed, I take it, that I was capable of marrying with a wretched affair of that sort on my mind?"

"Ah, do you seriously suppose I could be as naïve as that? No. My cousin knew certain facts which she thought might one day be of use to me, and so she told me of them; not, of course," she finished, with her elaborate manner, "until after I was married."

Cushing paused to choose his words. "Well, I could have told her that I'm incapable of any and every sort of disloyalty to you—incapable of it: it's the usual phrase, but it's simply and accurately what I mean."

"Yes?"

"Yes? But my dear child, how could you seriously believe, when we've been married scarcely six months, that you needed to warn me in this way? And that's the reason you supposed that Edith wanted to have Geraldine with her—no, it's too fantastic!"

"Scarcely as fantastic as you, my dear! Yes, you see, but I am getting to know you! There would always be

a streak of virtue in all your vices; they would be accidents, instead of pleasures. That is the kind of unfaithfulness which is dangerous and which persists. The moral sense—you would have it even in immorality!" Her eyes met his with a light irony veiling their tenacity. "Very well, then. All I want is your assurance that the present conditions will be maintained."

Cushing paused again. Her words seemed to force him to a long series of conclusions. They had suddenly become the measure which proved to him how little any exchange of deep confidence had taken place between them.

"And you need my assurance? But can't you see it—can't you feel that you have it?"

"Of course I know that you have every desire to be considerate to me."

"That's not the point. Don't you see that, whatever follies I may have committed when I was free, I'm bound now—exactly that—for the rest of my life?"

"Bound?" Her shoulders rose and fell. "None the less, I should like to have your assurance."

"I'm sorry you've asked for it," he returned briefly. "But you have it."

"Thank you, my dear; you are very good." It seemed to him, as she replied, that it was not the least obscure part of what she did that she could so expertly apply all the amenities of courtesy to their relation. She turned toward the door, as if it were also part of her skill to be able to end the matter as she pleased.

"We must dress; it is late, and do you remember that we are dining out? Oh, and one thing more. You did not mean it, I am sure, but when you came in this afternoon—before Edith arrived and when those ladies,

friends of Miss Morrow's, were here—you did not greet me very politely. Did you notice?"

"And if I had noticed should I have done it?" Cushing's laugh had a sharp edge. "Aren't you a little rude, to suppose me capable of being rude to you?"

She disregarded this, with a light gesture. "You could not greet me as you would like to greet me, in public; that is evident. But you could at least take my hand or make some sign, instead of saying 'Well, Anne-Marie,' as you say 'Well, Edith.' Those things are slight but they are none the less important."

"Well, it's a paradox that's beyond me! It's not so much that, if you don't condone infidelities, at least you accept them—and then that in the next breath you require one so sedulously to observe a form! It's that you simply don't see. It's just that; you don't see the fact behind the fact. You don't see that if I wronged you, in the slightest way or in the gravest, I'd wrong all the reasons I have to be alive!"

He had laid his hands on her shoulders, and under this closer scrutiny he saw that her face changed. Her eyelids quivered and she drew back. "Very well, then; but none the less I am glad that Mimi told me. I have not, of course, seen Mrs. Herring; but with a woman of that type—well, one never knows."

VII

ONE evening, two years later, these first events of his married life came back to Cushing with peculiar vividness.

He had opened the hall door and come out for a breath of fresh air, on a dripping autumn night when the dampness was colder than frost and the steady rain which had fallen all day appeared to penetrate the solidity of the very stones. On each side the familiar street stretched its narrow length to where the noise of heavy traffic flowed in opposite directions, and the yellow lights struck long trembling reflections from the wet asphalt. The opposite houses, in spite of their monotonous ugliness, had the friendliness of faces which had watched him until they knew him well—or, as his wife would have put it, which would have watched him if they had had any personality to watch with. He was conscious that he now saw his surroundings as changed in the light of her comments, just as what he regarded as the sources of his happiness itself had assumed, under the dissection of her irony, an effect which was disconcerting and specious.

The day had been one of extended fatigue, the culmination of a six weeks of trying anxiety. Miss Morrow had surprised them by her sudden arrival from Paris, in the preceding month. He and his wife had at once insisted that she should make her headquarters at their house, and when she had felt herself established under the care of her former ward's affection, she had confided to them that her doctors pronounced her gravely ill. There was something peculiarly touching to Cushing in the fact of her return. She had evidently been beset by the nostalgia of the woman who has lived without any sequence of tradition or occupation. Uncomfortable as she pronounced New York to be and scandalous as she found its prices, he could see that her dependence on France had imper-

ceptibly disappeared; and it seemed to him that her return was marked with the pathos of all silent reactions.

Her condition had soon become worse, and two days before she had died. Cushing, his sister and his wife had been constantly with her during the past weeks, and what had consoled her more than his support or Edith Sale's capable care was Anne-Marie's grief. The prick of doubt with which the girl had inspired her had never been quite dispelled, and she had not appeared entirely to trust the outcome of the marriage. If more of the outward signs of orthodoxy had been present—if they had had a child or if Anne-Marie had shown a more obvious assimilation of his tastes and habits, Cushing saw that her uncertainties would have been satisfied. To be able to share so deep an emotion had bridged the gap, and the sorrow which her illness and her approaching end inspired, and Anne-Marie's complete surrender to it, had evidently seemed to Miss Morrow more nearly comprehensible than anything which had occurred between them.

Yet all day Cushing had been conscious of his curiosity as to what Miss Morrow herself would have felt if she could have witnessed this same grief on the day of her funeral. The most lenient spectator would have been unable to separate Anne-Marie's tears from her careful sense of fashion and from her concern as to the way in which her *crêpe* veil should fall from her shoulders. The various duties which went with his executorship of Miss Morrow's wishes had kept him busy and preoccupied. But he had been unable to escape from his persistent astonishment at his wife's capacity to be overcome by the sadness of death and yet to treat it as the most social of occasions. As the person who stood for

Miss Morrow's family, she had expected to receive the condolences of their friends and to admit them all to the spectacle of her sorrow. It was more than usually annoying to Cushing that every one stared at her and that he should feel her to be in need of such generous allowances of judgment. As they had turned from the grave he had been unable to suppress a sharp exclamation. "Come, come, my dear, this really won't do. As drama it may be passable, but as life it's outrageous!" As he spoke it seemed to him that the real significance of the occasion had been lost for him in something petty and factitious, and that she was to blame for it. If one did not have the restraints of decency, at such times, at least one might be expected to have the restraints of intelligence.

It was perhaps the most perplexing part of Anne-Marie's ingenuity that, in spite of these differences between them—differences so slight, and yet so insidious that they were offences—his happiness could still be brilliant. If he had looked at it only outwardly, he would not have been able to deny the success with which she had emerged from the tests of the last two years. Her single ambition had appeared to be to identify herself with his life and her single desire to please him. He had to grant that she had proved this in practical ways. Her own difficulties in settling into this rôle of devotion must have been real, and in looking back he remembered how gallantly she had tried to meet them. Yet, as he frequently felt, if she had complained more and been less eager to acquit herself he could have understood her better than he could understand her impervious

standpoints and her persistent confusion of what was trivial with what was important.

Slight as his difficulties in dealing with her were, he knew that it was his uncertainty as to where they would next spring up and how quickly they might extend which gave him his constant sense of instability. Through the interval of the two years he could trace back all their differences to beginnings which had been only charming. It had been inevitable, as he came to regard his marriage less as an exception to all the other happenings of his life, that such differences should become more than trying divergences of opinion. The quaintness of Anne-Marie's oblique views had disappeared; her very accent had ceased to mean more to him than the irritating persistence of some of her French habits.

It was above all the unspoken detachment which argued so little feeling in her which had been hard for both his patience and his pride. When she was angry she was usually pathetic, and his sympathy was then aroused easily enough. But her reactions were usually to a reticence as perfect as it was intangible. The impermeable front she opposed to him was the same with which she faced the conditions of his life: her acceptance might be of the letter, but it was never of the spirit. She was scrupulously careful never to complain. Yet Cushing was never for an instant unaware of what it cost her to do without the complexities of surrounding and finish which were her natural air. He had not once known her to make the smallest concession of standard. She was never agreeably surprised by one of the people who came to dine, by a book or by a play. It had seemed to him that she reached the very height of her power to

appear different from her surroundings when they were in the country. He never saw her, in the seaside place where he and Mrs. Sale spent their summers and which had always seemed to him to have the charm of high bright skies and fresh winds, without seeing, too, all from which he had transported her. He could imagine her best in a long *allée*, whose straight tall trees were the darkest green, standing with her fine chin raised and her hands arrested in one of her upward gestures. There was always moonlight on the gleaming satin of her dress, as it lay motionless against the grass, and on the long spiral of a fountain, where the trees parted. Her acceptance of the free American summer life had been as carefully courteous as everything else. Her only remark to him was that people who lived in rooms without doors and in gardens without walls showed how uninterestingly little they had to conceal. But it seemed to Cushing that under the force of her influence the very landscape around them tried to formalise itself into some suggestion of style, and he felt a certain grim sympathy with its failure.

If she had been really stirred by what was outside her own prejudices, he was conscious that he could have been genuinely sorry for her. But her idea of the proprieties required her to put up with what she disliked, with an indirection so elaborate that it was difficult to take her seriously. Cushing had once or twice urged her, since his own affairs pressed closely, to leave him and spend a few weeks in France. He ought to have remembered, he said, how dependent a person of her type was upon *les eaux*, and that she was made to pass the summer tightly tied up in veils and listening to a band.

But her invariable reply had been a refusal. French women, she added for his information, travelled alone only to seek adventures or to conceal them. She clung tenaciously to the fulfilment of her duties. Yet he was not allowed to forget her dislikes; and she consoled herself during the summers by contriving long absences in town—her dressmaker or her dentist was usually the excuse—with an elaboration of arrangement, as he dryly noted, which bordered on intrigue.

Cushing had been accustomed to see women either impose their own preferences or else pass them over indifferently; and he had become more and more sharply aware of the unchangeable qualities in his wife. The only awkwardness she ever showed was in her surprise that the element into which she had to fit herself was so intangible and so fluid. It had been the same in her dealings with people. Her fine apprehensions were most at a loss in that they were not required to apply themselves collectively. Cushing's humour had divined that she herself was no more puzzled than the recipients of her grave formalities. The scrupulousness and regularity of her invitations were as puzzling as her attentions to ladies of Miss Morrow's age, who, in their square old houses, seemed surprised almost beyond pleasure at the seriousness with which she accepted their pale traditions. Edith's friends, who ran to all shades of difference, were interested in her as long as she had the novelty of the stranger. Her accent and the eccentricities of her manner had for them something of the charm her foreignness had had for Miss Morrow. But as they grew to know her better it was obvious that they thought her disappointing. Cushing had to acknowledge that when she

did not enchant she was ineffectual. People could not understand that she did not mean them to pass beyond her elaborate courtesy, any more than she understood the lack of cohesion between their dinner-table guests. They regarded social intercourse as something inevitably consisting of crowds and entertainment; and she, he saw, understood as she sat alone at home, in her upright elegance, the existence of a codified society which they would never approach.

He was roused from his thoughts by the sound of his sister's voice in the hall behind him. They had brought her back to dine, and he had left her, half an hour before, trying to comfort Anne-Marie's outbursts of reminiscent grief.

He was unconscious of his dependence upon Mrs. Sale at such times, and he showed it now by making no effort, as he walked down the steps with her to her waiting motor, to hide the fatigue with which the difficulties of the day had marked his face. His sister slipped her hand through his arm as she glanced at him. "What a day it's been for you! And all that you'll now have on your hands, with this estate——!"

The set patience of Cushing's face broke into a smile, on which the light of the motor lamps struck. "Oh, don't beat about the bush. You mean, what's a mere executorship compared to a wife who cries like that!"

Edith drew back on the curb, out of earshot of her chauffeur. "Yes; I suppose it's what I do mean."

"It's not, I acknowledge, a usual custom!"

"Ah, but it's probably hard for a stranger to conform to our dull Anglo-Saxon ways all at once——"

Cushing's amusement stopped her. "Dear Edith, you're an angel. In spite of all you must, as a human being, sometimes wonder—you've a loyalty to Anne-Marie which is almost too good—which is sometimes almost a strain to keep up with!"

Mrs. Sale returned his smile. "That's all very well. But don't you see that when one continually witnesses the invasion of a point of view like hers one's got to be scrupulously loyal to her, or——"

"Or else the impulse to take her by the shoulders and shake her would be irresistible? And don't you think——" He paused. "Don't you think I invade, on my side?"

"No, my dear; you don't invade. You merely refuse to conform."

"I refuse at a brisk rate, I assure you," said Cushing lightly.

"And you get an enormous return. Any woman whose head tilts so charmingly——!"

"Oh, I get everything—everything. All I'm saying is that I also get something of a curiosity——" He broke his sentence off. It had struck him, with sudden acuity, that his exchange of comment with his sister had never since his marriage been as definite as this. He had understood that it was as instinctive with her as with him to feel that where his wife was concerned they were committed to tacit understandings rather than to explanations.

Mrs. Sale's foot was on the step of her motor when she turned and spoke again. "You won't mind if I say what I'm going to—even if it surprises you? I've a message for you—from Geraldine. She wants to see you."

Her tone was so definitely different from the one she had used a second before that Cushing waited in astonishment. "Geraldine! She wants to see me? And why?"

"That's just what she said you'd say——" She broke off. "We talked it over last evening—she's just come to me again for a fortnight—and it was some time before I could convince her it was worth while to ask you. You know what she is. She said that you'd agree to come, of course; but that that wouldn't alter the fact that you'd regard it as a bother and a bore."

He could see that his sister had slowly flushed. He had often thought that she had a keener sense of delicacy for him than for herself.

"If you'll come to-morrow at five she'll be in and she'll be alone. Only Paul—do come." She hesitated again. "Oh, I know that once she may have had her notions of freedom and that every young man has his. I suppose you had yours. That doesn't concern me. But now she wants something—that's evident. I don't know what; but if she hadn't had a reason she'd never have asked you. Oh, of course I know that you've met, in the last year or so, and met perfectly freely. But, as she said, a summons from her was different. At least she predicted you'd regard it as different." Her hands fell into his. "But do come!"

Cushing waited for another moment, and then his shoulders rose. "Well, after all, the point isn't why should I go to see her, but why shouldn't I!"

He stood on the curb until her motor was out of sight. It seemed to him that any question except his intimate personal ones gradually receded with it. He was im-

mensely tired, and there was something restful in the light touch of rain on his face and in the peculiar desolation in the wet autumn air. He knew that his wife was probably still up and waiting to see him. Yet he felt his energy lag. He would find her engaged in some of those complex processes of her toilet which had lately seemed to him a little absurd. He had learned too well, he thought ironically, as he turned towards the door, the routine not only of her habits but of her emotions.

VIII

ANNE-MARIE, who was seated at her dressing-table, threw a look over her shoulder as he entered.

"Ah, what a draught you let in!—and when you know there is nothing I detest as much as a draught! It makes one want to cry with vexation."

"Well, my dear child, you must cry, then," said Cushing, smiling. He had dropped into a chair beside her, and he was regarding her with the amused tenderness which she could rouse in him before he was aware of it. Between the shaded lamps on her dressing-table the light struck on the whiteness of her figure, from the line her petticoat drew against the floor up to the gleam of her forehead, under the dark folds she was coiling above it.

She leaned back in her chair, with a long sigh.

"Oh, what a day! There is nothing left of me but exhaustion. That horrible clergyman—what was his name? No, I cannot think of it. I did not think Edith's hat was very appropriate. She does not understand that it is more important to look appropriate than to look

extravagant. But you, my dear—you looked so distinguished, so in the proper tone. No, there is nothing left of me.”

Cushing had lit a cigarette, and he found himself settling into the comfort of his chair, with unconscious relaxation, while he watched the swift movement of her hands among her gold-topped bottles and boxes.

“I shall wear a severe mourning for six months—I have decided,” she pursued, looking at herself critically in the mirror. “That seems to me correct. Of course Miss Morrow was like a near relative to me.”

“It would seem to me an advantage if you could wear mourning which was a little calmer than what you wore to-day,” said Cushing, still keeping his smile.

“But, my dear, mourning is not only a sign of courtesy. It is a sign of feeling.”

“Well, then, one might say that to show so much feeling was scarcely decent.”

Anne-Marie broke out hotly: “*Dieu merci*, I am indecent, then. Miss Morrow rescued me from misery. Is it indecent to admit that? I suppose so. I shall trail yards and yards of crêpe, if it seems to me proper—yes, yards and yards of it——” She paused. Cushing’s silent shrug appeared to caution her, as well as some instinct of prudence which he had lately seen at work in her. It was evident that at times she too foresaw their disagreements and antagonisms. He never watched the effort she made to control herself, farcical as it often was, without a stir of his sympathy and a sense that the maturity which it argued in her was a little sad. Her thoughts had evidently followed his, for she bent towards him with a quick return to her former manner.

"My dear, I am wicked to be rude to you. Yes. And I am inconsiderate, too, and that is worse. Look! I have let you sit there with no place to put the ashes of your cigarette. See, here is a tray. No, there is nothing left of me. When you came in I was looking at myself and thinking just that; and yet it is the consolation of a woman of my type that fatigue accentuates us, rather than destroys us. I am not beautiful—no one could call me that. But I have a certain something: *je ne suis vraiment pas trop mal.*" She seemed to know intuitively that she had better keep to this tone; then, drawing a finger over the fulness of her cheek, up across her eyebrows and down her sensitive nose, she continued musingly: "I wonder how I shall look when I am dead!"

Cushing's tired nerves sharpened his tone. "Dear Anne-Marie, you've talent for raking up the most odious notions——!"

"But do you never wonder? Ah, never, I suppose. You are too busy. And yet how can you not wonder!"

"Oh, I've enough to wonder about where you're concerned!"

She disregarded the affectionate raillery of his tone, and she began to draw off her rings, looking at herself thoughtfully in the mirror. "Ah, well, some day you will see me not difficult or emotional or fantastic, but dead. Yes. Only a few years—think! How pitifully short it is! And I shall die first; yes, my lungs will one day go—but like that! I shall die, and lie like poor Miss Morrow, so grave and white. It breaks one's heart. Poor soul, and she looked so meek—she, who was never meek. And you will say: 'She had faults; she cried too much, and I did not always sympathise with her taste, but after all

she was very charming, Anne-Marie. And to think that once she was young, and that once her hair was soft and full of life, and that her hands were once so alive and her nails were once so pink——! And what is she now——?”

She broke off, with the question of her smile. Cushing found himself wondering for a moment at the unfailing ingenuity with which she could move him; then both the appeal of her look and his own fatigue overcame his resistance and he bent forward and caught her hand so suddenly that one of the bottles on the dressing-table overturned with a crash.

“Don’t—I’m too tired. It’s been too difficult a day. We’ll die, I suppose. But what does it matter? All that matters is that there’ll be some future for the kind of love I’ve had for you, some immortality——”

Her eyes still rested on his. “How absurd, my dear! Immortality!”

“Well, why not immortality? The more I live the more I seem to see how dependent our lives are on the fact of death—on the last high stroke which makes all that’s gone before fall into place——” He paused. It gave him an indefinable sense of being checked to see that she was listening with her slowest smile—a smile which had the peculiar quality of making her light scepticism seem as innately a part of her as her scents and her laces and the powder on her neck.

“You like to talk about all these large ideas till the universe becomes one vast draught.” She shook her head. “But you fool yourself a little, my poor Paul. No, but how absurd it is! I believe you like to believe in heaven because it is so distant. I believe”——her crooked eye-

brows were raised to their highest—"I believe you would like to turn even me into one of those spiritual realities one cannot touch!"

Cushing's recoil was so instinctive that it took him unawares. She had never aroused in him a feeling which so nearly verged on repulsion. He waited for a moment before he spoke. "Don't you see when you say things like that you spoil it all—that you ruin what is the dignity of feeling?"

She straightened herself and her face slowly darkened. "What do you mean? Explain to me what you mean!"

"Oh, sometimes you've a way of saying things—a way of insisting on the concrete—that's nothing short of indelicacy. If you knew how I detest to accuse you of it—you, who are really all delicacy——"

Instead of making one of her usual quick retorts she seemed to catch herself up and deliberate. "So you think——"

"My poor child, you don't seem to see it, but you've a way of reducing things to the bare machinery of human nature. It's adroit, if you please, but it's also rather dreadful."

He had never seen her more tense. He could see even in her thin shoulders the brace of her defiance, as if every inch of her tried to sharpen the irony with which she responded. "Yet you say you continue to love me."

"Do you think there's been an instant, since I first loved you, that I haven't loved you? Come! Since we're facing it"—he spoke deliberately—"let's face it fully! When I fail to understand you and you me—do you stop

to think of that? That every second of every day I've loved you?"

"But of course I know you have loved me."

"But do you understand what I mean when I say that? By love, I mean my love of all of you—down to the inmost things which I believe I shall never lose. I don't separate one part from another, as you do. And when you insist on doing that—on stripping things of all but a rather stupidly concrete significance—then, I say, you spoil everything."

She shot a quick glance at him. "For the matter of that, I, too, have loved you; but do you think that helps?"

"Helps? It's everything!"

"Theoretically, yes; but practically——! Very well, then"—she put it with her incisive enunciation—"if you want to face it frankly, let me ask you: have you noticed, since the first warmth of our marriage wore itself out, that our love and our sympathy—and the instincts of our affection and the instincts of our sympathy—have corresponded less and less?"

Cushing paused for a second to grant that sometimes her unreasonableness carried her to the clearest truths. "Yes; I've noticed it," he assented.

"And why, do you think, has it been so?"

"You've been everything lovely to me—ah, everything. You've kept my feeling for you so fresh and so exquisite"—he waited—"but when it comes to the more important bond——"

She struck his shoulder with her hand. "Exactly. You are right. It is the most important bond, and we have not had it. We have not succeeded from my point

of view any more than from yours. And why? Because you would not let me succeed."

"It hasn't been that I didn't want to let you," he said gravely.

"Want! There it is. You want to do right, and so you are somehow in the right. No, I beg you, Paul! When we married we knew we differed, did we not? We were prepared to make allowance for our unlikeness. And what happened? I saw at once that I was to you something delightful, curious, like a *bibelot* from a strange place. I amused you; my French amused you, my English amused you, my ignorances and my mistakes. And what did I find out? That you never intended to take me seriously. All you wanted me to do was to continue to delight you. You wanted to smile at me and to give me money, and that was all. Is that not true?"

"It's true that I never had a thought but to love you."

"Yes. But true, too, that I have never for an instant shared with you. Shared! Do you think I have not known that you never let me share? Do you think I have not minded that I was merely delightful or annoying—all delightful people are sometimes annoying—from your point of view? Have you regretted as I have regretted that we have no child?" He felt her search his face with her quick, sharp curiosity. "No; to you children would not be what they would be to me. I am not clever; I do not care to learn things—perhaps I am even stupid. But there again it was the same. Ah, you are so incredible! I know you have hoped for a child, and yet you felt your hope was less important than your consideration for me. You felt it was loyal to your love to be afraid of the pain for me, the drag, the discomforts.

No, I can tell you this," she ended, "and that is that I have not liked to be the kind of wife you made me."

"Then why," he caught her up, "haven't you made things different? Why haven't you made me see, if you wanted to share, that you could share?"

"But how could one share with a woman whom one spoils and finds amusing? You say I have not made you share, that I have entered into your life only in one way. Very well, then, you have never responded to anything else. We women," her shoulders rose and fell, "we must naturally do what pays us best."

Cushing waited for a moment, and then laid an impulsive hand again on hers. "But you must know what I feel—that's the essential thing! I'll try, my dear; I'll do my best to be less obtuse and to give you more of a chance——"

Her lip quivered and her eyes first darkened and then brightened. She had let her hands fall limply to her lap; and as he took in the limpid intensity of the look she returned to him Cushing was extraordinarily touched. For the first time he seemed to see disclosed the extent of her unhappiness. Her usually compact face was grave and saddened. Its expression of discouragement marked for him the extent of the failure of a feeling which was not deeply consequent and relevant, not practically concerned with the actual conditions of life.

He saw that, like the prehensive creature she was, she had caught the trend of his thoughts and that she flushed deeply. Her flush spread to her forehead and the look of pale discouragement which replaced it matched the tremulousness of her mouth. She rose and stood beside him with her hands interlaced.

"There is one thing we can do. We can change the basis of our relationship."

"Change it? How on earth can we change it?"

"We can acknowledge that your idea of marriage"—her light mockery flitted over her face—"your idea that it is intensely legal in form and a little illicit in application—is a failure. Because, of course, it is a failure. We could frankly admit it. Any attempt to improve it will not be any more of a success. That is evident enough. Since we have tried an American marriage, we may as well try an American failure. At least I shall be less miserable, if I am also less happy. We can live more or less apart, as your husbands and wives here so often do. It seems to me hideous, but what else is left to us? I can travel, you can pay my bills, we can bow when we pass in the street——" Her voice broke. "I admit that I am ignorant of such vulgarities, but we can at least try it."

"But don't you see"—he struggled with the difficulty of expressing himself—"don't you see that I can't accept that sort of invalid compromise any more than you can?"

"But that is just what you have accepted." She clasped her hands. "Oh, is it not the simple truth that people like ourselves always fail—people who have too much affection for their sympathy and too little sympathy for their affection?"

He caught her hands again. "I'll do anything—everything. You'll see—things will change."

She shook her head. "Things may change, but you will not. You will not really let me into your life."

"You've only to try me. Don't I tell you—need I tell you—that I'll do anything in the world for you?"

"And let me be what I want to be to you? Let me in every way share?" she demanded.

"Yes, let you share!" he declared. He gave her back her look with all his confidence, and then he was suddenly aware that his humour had touched the situation irresistibly. The request scarcely fitted the scene, the hour, and the appearance she presented—all so studiously arranged. He glanced around the room and back to where the contents of the bottle he had upset were dripping to the floor, unable to suppress his smile. In a second she had perceived it, and she sprang to her feet, pale with antagonism, and began again the tears she had shed all day.

IX

IT was not until Cushing paused in the doorway of his sister's drawing room on the following afternoon that he felt the possible significance of the message in response to which he had come.

He had been detained at his office by the events of a busy day, and he had had to cut short an interview of some urgency and hurry to reach Mrs. Sale's apartment at the appointed time. What little thought he had given the matter, since the day before, had reminded him of both how frank and how indifferent Mrs. Herring's assumptions had all along been. He had always found in her the same impersonal friendliness; and since she had continued to be intermittently under his sister's roof, he had seen the importance of showing her that on his side there was no more desire to avoid their meetings than on hers. It was Mrs. Herring herself who had dispelled

any latent uncertainties which had remained in his mind. Indeed, as he had had an opportunity to see what the last two or three years had done for her, Cushing had had to grant, with a faint amusement, that he had never found in her as much to like.

In the days immediately following her divorce from a dissipated husband, and when her reluctance to form a new permanent tie had gradually become clear to him, Cushing had already seen the difficulties of a charm which was assertive and flagrant rather than lurking and delicate. She had seemed to him then to live entirely by her intuition and by the amazing correctness with which she knew the right month to be in Paris, the right weeks for Venice, the opera to admire and the attitude to assume before a picture. As he had received his recent impressions of her he had seen, however, that her knack had become more personal and that she had acquired the right touch for the right person with the sureness of a more supple cleverness. She had not Mrs. Sale's ways of sharing a man's interests any more than she had his wife's idle grace, but she had too quick a plasticity not to be ready with the amusing response and the stimulative question. He knew that it had been his own distaste for the recollections she inspired which had made him glad of her expertness. Yet if he had his flashes of memory concerning signs of deeper feeling in her, it was she herself who, whenever he thought he discerned them, plainly denied their existence. Her very sincerities were hopelessly contradictory.

She had closed her book deliberately and looked up at him with a gradually deepening smile when the door shut behind him. Some suggestion in her look, so much

graver and more reposeful than usual, carried Cushing back, in an instant, to the look she had given him in the crowded Paris post-office and which, in spite of everything else about her, had conveyed to him an impression of indefinable feeling.

"My dear Paul, how exceedingly nice of you!" she exclaimed; and as Cushing drew up a chair she added: "I shan't beat about the bush any more than I usually beat about the bush. I knew Edith was to be out this afternoon, and I wanted to see you alone."

Cushing gave her back her smile. "On the contrary, how exceedingly nice of you! Isn't it one of the advantages of having you here with Edith—that one can sometimes see you?"

"Is it an advantage, though—sometimes to see me?" she retorted, as easily as before. "Enough of an advantage to compensate for the bother? I don't mean that you'd consider me a bother; heavens, no. You'd never give me as much flattery as that. I only mean that I must be sometimes in the way—that you must like to keep to Edith yourself. It's ridiculous she and I are friends, isn't it? I suppose your wife would say that all women's friendships are ridiculous. She probably puts us down as exactly what we are—two unattached, childless women, about whom men don't bother and who have nothing better to do. She always has the perfect phrase for every human condition."

Cushing's amusement deepened. "Has she? You're so determined to be unattached?"

"I'm determined in nothing—surely you know that—except perhaps in my affection for Edith. Think what she rescues me from—dear Edith! If you could guess

all the things any woman like me, without much money and with no ties, has to spend her time in avoiding! If it were only that she saves me from people I detest and whom I haven't the character to evade, I should owe her enough. And as for you"—she paused—"and as for its being nice of me to see you, that's nonsense. You've known all along that you could see me whenever you wanted to." She gave him a quick look. "You've come now—you came to-day—because you thought I had been nice. Yet you've got the mental reservation that after all it was my business to be nice! You're not the person to refuse to see that it was obviously all I could do, are you? But I've not minded; for that matter, I mind nothing." She had dropped back among her cushions with an air of resignation in her own amusement. "I mind nothing until I come in at night sleepy and a little battered and say to myself, 'For heaven's sake what's the use of it all?'"

Cushing lost himself for a moment in the recollections her tone stirred in him. It was her tone, indeed, more than what she said—her agile method of dealing with the surface of things, in talk as well as in manner, which reminded him of more, in a single instant, than actual words. In one form or another he had never heard her fail to use it. He could have predicted the way she would talk as accurately as he could have foretold the strident colours of her tea gown and her care to hold her head so as to get the contrast between the colour of her hair and the cushion behind it. Her sense of effect had at one time amused him, even if it had never convinced him. It had been quite compatible with the attraction she had had for him—and at a time when his own discriminations

were less acute—that he should all along have been aware of the disproportion between them. He remembered that at first he had thought her cynicism as decorative as the rest of her. But towards the time when they had both begun to drift from a situation in which there was little to hold them, it had seemed to him more applied and forced than anything else about her and to have less air of reality. He had had his experiences since in methods which were both profound and spontaneous; and as he looked across at her it struck him that he, of all people, could have told her that, adroit as she was, one didn't so easily get the natural force of the qualities she imitated.

Mrs. Herring, meanwhile, had bent forward to pour out his tea, and as she raised her head again, with her look of quizzical interrogation, she brought out: "But of course there was a reason for my asking you to come; you've understood that."

"You wouldn't have asked me without a reason, you mean?"

Her gaze roamed for a moment around the room, in the wide spaces of which the glow of the fire appeared to enclose and isolate them. "No—you've put it exactly. It's been easy enough, of course, when we've happened to meet. But to plan a meeting, I felt that you'd feel I needed an excuse." She smiled. "Well, my excuse is my news. I've made up my mind to marry."

Cushing heard himself answer instantly, in the usual terms of congratulation. His attention scarcely held enough to enable him to gauge what he said. Mrs. Herring had done nothing, while she spoke, but drop her voice and bend forward so that the stronger light of the lamp

beside her deepened the suggestions of her face. Yet he had never felt more vividly the confusing element in her—the suspicions one had of what was behind her manner and the elaborate negation of her manner itself.

“And who is it? Since you’ve told me your intention, you’ll tell me who’s to benefit by it,” he ended.

“Oh, I’m in luck—astounding luck. It’s incredible that such a happy chance should have befallen a rootless creature like me. I’m engaged to Arthur Irish. Do you know him?” And to Cushing’s protest that, if any one on any continent could escape knowing him, his millions and his extraordinary collections were beyond escape, she smilingly assented: “You see, then, it’s a match—it’s an alliance. I don’t know quite how we’ve drifted into it. Of course all that really interests him are his Grecos and his Ming. But I suppose that at times they grow monotonous and that it grows monotonous to be quoted as the most expert collector in all America. So here we are, and our engagement’s an accomplished fact.”

Cushing was again silent. His thoughts were dealing with himself more rapidly and exactly than with Mrs. Herring. It struck him that his marriage had taught him the lessons which made him best able to understand her. She had never puzzled him except when she touched the serious, and then only because she showed how little her seriousness existed. He had learned to measure the extent of a woman’s qualities rather than their superficial definition, and that for Mrs. Herring to lean back, in a becoming light, and talk with a private allusiveness was not enough to stir interest unless there was a corresponding emotion behind it. His wife, he reflected, theatrical as she was, had too strong a dramatic sense not to have

proved to him that human relations, to be interesting, needed more than a pose and an implication.

He granted that it was one of the absurd contrasts of experience that his accusation of Mrs. Herring should be that she was what Anne-Marie would have called bloodless. Yet he could find no other term which fitted her as well. Every glimpse he had of her deeper feelings was so complex that it was hopelessly confusing. If she had told him of her approaching marriage before she told people generally, he knew how frequently, during her visits to Mrs. Sale, she had passed a half hour in his company rather than pass it alone. For the first time he felt a keen distaste for her obtuseness. He could understand disgust with one's memories, but he could not understand being without them. There was a difference as wide as the world between such an attitude and the excessive imaginativeness of feeling in his wife—the kind of feeling she had shown him when they were engaged and first married and which she knew so well, when it suited her, how to show still. If Anne-Marie had been in such a situation she would have had profounder decencies than these; yet the uncertainty which the thought woke arrested him. He remembered the proof he had had that, underneath all her complex and correct observances, she was at times crass.

He was recalled to himself by seeing that Mrs. Herring had turned back from the fire, on which her gaze had been fixed, and the next moment she suddenly rose.

"I've been unfair to you," she broke out. "I haven't been quite straight—ah, but what a relief it is to say it!"

Cushing had risen, too. His surprise held his eyes on

hers and he saw that under his gaze the colour rose quickly and spread over her face.

"No; I've been odious—and I've been absurd, which is worse," she declared. "Or is it worse? That's my usual vocabulary; and I'm sick to death of my usual vocabulary."

A few moments before, Cushing was clearly aware, he would have answered her with some temporising expostulation; but in the intervening seconds she had so changed—scarcely so much changed, perhaps, as broken up her complex system of defence and let him see the basis beneath—that he never, for an instant, considered being less honest than she. "But you've never been odious," he began; "I don't see——"

"That's it!" She caught him up. "You haven't seen. It hasn't been your fault; you simply haven't seen."

She spoke without the faintest note of recrimination; merely, as it seemed to Cushing, as if she stated an incontrovertible fact. The press of the inferences behind it, all the more insistent and strange because of the clear calmness of her voice, blurred his mind for an instant.

"Ah, if I haven't seen—if I've been obtuse, I'm so endlessly sorry! I've wanted to be considerate. I've wanted not only to foresee what could recall to you what was disagreeable and what could annoy you"—he felt the words hopelessly inadequate—"I've wanted, too, to imagine what could annoy you, and deflect it before it reached you. But you've never given me any reason——"

"No; I've not given you reasons of any sort," she assented, still with the same even tonelessness.

"If you'd been dissatisfied with my conduct, if you'd

shown me a sign, I should have tried not to be enough of an ass to miss it. I've wanted to spare you——" He felt himself flush. "But there's seemed to be so little to spare! You're so sure of yourself; and if you'd felt me indelicate, you'd scarcely have come here, to Edith. Have you thought me indelicate? Is that it?"

She shook her head; her eyes held persistently to his, and the only additional sign he caught, through her silence, was in the quick tremor of her throat.

"Then, if I've not been indelicate, I must have understood at least something. I can't, in that case, have been so hopelessly obtuse! What I've seen least of all was any possible dishonesty on your part." He paused. "What dishonesty was it?" He continued to search her eyes, in the stress of his uncertainty, and then he drew sharply back. "You don't mean——"

She smiled faintly. "So you see at last! That's just what I do mean—that I've never for a second, in the last three years, ceased to care for you."

Cushing wavered for an instant; then he turned and walked quickly to the other end of the room. He had a confused sense that, however much she was hurt, it was kinder not to let her see his face, and the immense pity for her and the detestation of his own fatuity which must be written on it. The humiliating fact of his obtuseness ruined whatever he could say to her before it was spoken. As he waited and then turned back to where she stood, the humiliation grew and spread, over occasions which he had half forgotten. And the immense security, he thought, with which he had supposed one could accept the termination of a human relationship and cut its

threads with the same precision as if they had been inanimate!

He paused beside the fire again and leaned over the back of a chair towards her. "My dear Geraldine," he began in a low tone, "do I owe you for that?"

She moved restlessly. "Oh, you owe me for nothing! It doesn't matter. All that matters is that I've been dishonest—hideously dishonest."

"Never with me."

"Yes—always with you; wasn't it dishonest to ignore, to pretend indifference, to deny—to deny"—she hesitated, and then added simply—"what was the strongest thing in me?"

Another wave of abasement seemed to break over Cushing's head. "But it wasn't denying to live pluckily, to let it make you as fine a person as you are. That wasn't denying."

"No, I haven't failed it altogether." She smiled again, and it seemed to Cushing sadly significant that it should be when she changed her expression in her effort to affect lightness that it disclosed the full misery of her face. "I've had my consolations; some of them poor enough, but some of them good. The best have been when I felt free to let it influence me—when it hasn't been just an ache, but when it's really helped."

Cushing broke out: "Dishonest! The only dishonesty was that when you told me you'd rather end things between us you didn't let me see!"

She shook her head, with an odd suggestion of the judicial manner with which she was apt to deliver her tart judgments. "No, I'm not definitely sure that then there was anything special to see. After my husband left me—

well, I don't know, but it seemed as if there was only one thing I wouldn't do and that was to try another marriage. When you proposed to me, you know, I laughed at you. I was prepared for anything that meant an indefinite relation. It wasn't you who prepared me for it. I was defiant—I think that was it. I wanted to be as free as all my friends were. I wanted to come and go as I pleased, to have the full use of my own money. It isn't a fortune, but my husband had squandered it so! I knew just what I meant to do—just what I had the bravado to do, and so I did it. No, I'm not sure that then—when I first knew you—there was anything definite."

"Then you changed? But why," he protested again, "when you did change, didn't you let me see? I didn't marry for another year!"

Her smile again threw into light the suppressed feeling in her face. "I wasn't such a fool as that. You see, it wasn't that I changed, or that I began to care, as much as that you'd changed me. I don't suppose you know what a definite sort of person you are—that you do change one. I think what began to influence me—funnily enough—was my understanding that I'd never do—that, for any question of real feeling on your part, I was hopelessly inadequate. You never talked about it; but somehow, in those few months, and though you were glad enough I'd consented to what I did consent to, since I wouldn't consent to marriage, you made me feel there was a line I never passed. You're a person who can really care—I mean just that. And I saw what it would take to make you care. You wanted some one to gather up all the loose things in you—the hopes and the failures, the capacities and the incapacities." She looked at him curiously.

"Perhaps you've learned that, too; it doesn't matter so much what feeling people give us, but what feeling we give them."

She was silent for an instant; then she made a quick gesture of impatience.

"Oh, I'm not going to deny it. I knew you never cared for me. I was just the person in your way—we all know how those things happen. And at first, honestly, it was the same with me. You were just the person who, at the right time, was in my way. But afterwards—well, it was different."

She had ended as briefly and finally as she had put the statement before him; and for a moment Cushing could only wait, passing for the hundredth time over the futile reproaches of his own blindness. He was aware now that his single dread was that he should prove himself incapable of recognising the truth of her confidence; a truth so palpable that even if he could have controverted it to her advantage he knew it would have been dishonest to do so.

"You know the endlessness of my desire to help you," he began.

"But you have helped me—you do help me."

"Ah, in such inadequate ways!"

She shook her head again. "No—practically. That, you see, is my gain. Oh, when we broke things up—when I insisted on it—I was utterly wretched. I was confused, then; I was afraid; I didn't understand. I was still angry with life. But then, after that, I learned. I learned what it was really to care. You've done that for me, you see."

"And what you've done for me—the thing without re-

turn, the thing which, in my immense stupidity, I never saw——”

She interrupted. “You weren’t stupid not to see it. That was really my fault. I’ve covered things up so—one does, somehow, and they become so obscured that they only exist down deep in one. Oh, it hasn’t all been plain sailing. I resented it; I fought and I protested. But that’s over now. I’ve recognised”—she made a quick gesture—“where I stand.”

“But we none of us see that, irrevocably. Life changes so—it’ll change for you. In my own life”—he hesitated and then pursued—“in my marriage, I’ve seen what one can gain. You’re to marry; you’ll make new ties for yourself; you’ll see—it’ll be different.”

Her eyes again caught his. “But I don’t want it to be different.”

“But my poor child”—the words escaped him before he was aware of it—“there’s no use in that!”

“Of course I see there’s no use in it.” As she spoke and then waited she presented to Cushing the full frankness of her look. Its message was deep and final; all the more so, he thought, because of the lingering sense, in the back of his mind, of her strange incongruities. It was like the contrast between the vital significance of her words and her appearance—as if she had not been able to shed all the outward signs of her complexity, and as if her elaborate dress and her general air of arrangement were there to remind him that, later on, she would slip back into her armour. Yet, whatever she did, Cushing thought, he would never again see in her anything less vivid than what her face now showed. It had always seemed to him less a controlled face than an expression-

less one. The face he most watched passed before his eyes. Alert and alive as it was, Anne-Marie's quick changes of expression registered emotions rather than the sentiments behind them; in Geraldine's face the feeling seemed gradually yet clearly to have risen to the surface, like long quivers of light on the surface of a stream.

He heard that she was going on: "I never thought, of course, that it would be like this to-day. I meant to tell you of my engagement—that it really seemed best, after all, to settle myself. I've thought it out for some weeks, and taking things at their face value I'd decided to do it. But there I'd reckoned without you, you see. When you came in, when we began to talk—oh, it wasn't anything you said; it was what I remembered that made me feel unjust. I felt I'd been unjust, not only to myself and not only to what you'd made me feel, but to Arthur."

"But you'd felt you could care for Irish—you must have felt that!" He searched for his words. "And those loyalties are such cruelly hopeless things. I can only say it to you again—things do change."

"I know"—she hesitated—"but it's change that I don't want. I don't deceive myself. I could be happy enough with Arthur, with all that money and that wonderful life to help. It's just that now I understand it: I'd rather be happy in my own way. Of course I can't marry," she ended.

When he had left the house and turned into the street which would take him home, it seemed to Cushing that he was in reality only passing from stage to stage of his memories.

It was the first time that he had ever understood how

briefly and temporarily, even at the time of its existence, he had regarded the episode of his relation with Mrs. Herring. It was true that he had been definitely under the spell of her brilliancy and of the easy terms on which she had accepted his companionship. Men liked her, and he had liked her, when chances threw them constantly together. He had been young enough to be glad of the absence in her of too conventional demands and restrictions. Her house—perhaps retaining the habits of its late master—had been easily and delightfully open to every one; and Cushing had at first gone no further than to fall insensibly into the lack of that formality which it was instinctive with his race to regard as restrictive.

He had always, and also instinctively, drawn the sharpest line between the morals of the women of his own class and the women of the class in which Mrs. Herring's husband had been most at home. He knew that it was as a rule only in older countries that, in a woman of certain antecedents, feeling reached the point of definite actions. The indiscretions of the women he knew had seldom seemed to him more than indiscretions, which never lost a careful sense of expediency. He seldom saw about him situations which entailed the loss of comforts and of superficial conformity; and this conclusion had made him regard his growing intimacy with Mrs. Herring less seriously and more as one of the several others which, as he suspected, she could have at her disposal whenever she chose. After a few weeks, when the charm of a summer, which Cushing had spent near her country cottage, was upon them both, he had asked her to marry him. Her refusal had given an edge to his enthusiasm. It had been an inevitable consequence, with her declared indepen-

dence and her love of adventure, that the matter should not end there. But he could still see before him the vividness of the summer day when, standing beside him on the shining strip of sand and with the sun warming and softening the radiance of the picture she made, she had turned to him with the smiling consent in her eyes for which he had been watching; and his own latent sense—as plainly part of the picture as if it had visibly stood out—of an odd regret that, since he liked her so much, she should prove herself so easily accessible.

It was always when they were happiest that the consciousness of this fact had returned. Cushing hoped that he had a clear conscience so far as women were concerned. He had accepted the general standards of his sex, but he had too definite a sense of chivalry to limit it to occasions when he could easily exercise it, and he had tried to be what he termed “decent” in all the chances of his life. It was exactly the point that, because Mrs. Herring was so integrally a part of his and his sister’s world, he should have felt secretly debased by the traffic in surface emotions in which he was engaged. Throughout the few months while the tie between them lasted he had never entirely freed himself from this thought. It underlay the happiest hours they had passed together and was the foundation, as he saw it now, for the first stirring of his restlessness. He could not say it had been he who first tired of the situation. Geraldine had been just as companionable, as easily acceptant of his mood and as without reluctances and misinterpretations. But he had been more and more definitely aware that he tired of a relation without any logical consequences. There was nothing to interest his imagination—no obsession, it was

true, but also none of that demand which, as it seemed to him, was the inseparable beauty of all relations. He could recall hour after hour, instance after instance, when either her perversity or her obtuseness had changed the possibility of his own feeling into triviality, and when he had turned from her with a vague resentment of such persistent limitations.

One of the results of the valiant frankness she had just shown was that, in looking back, he could not honestly change his version of what had happened. He had done his best, and done it to some extent in spite of her. But underneath his every smallest memory of those months there would now always lie the strangest contradictions in her and the illuminating fact of her feeling. He might not be able to reconstruct, either for better or worse, his own part. But he was rapidly reconstructing hers. He could see reasons which he had never seen before in her moodiness, her impatience, her perversities; or if they were not reasons, at least they were explanations—explanations attested by the silent avowal, deeper than the avowal in her words, which she had let him see.

His thoughts hung most persistently about the final day they had spent together. They had gone off on a motor trip, at the end of the year, and had put up one night, cold and tired from a long run, at an out-of-the-way inn. Cushing seemed to recollect the gathering irritability with which he had taken his seat opposite Mrs. Herring, in the tropically heated dining room filled with the odours of stale food and beer. The adjustments of their relation were not fine enough for premonitions, but his sense of an impending end had been none the less acute because it seemed practical and consequent. Per-

haps it had been the long days together which had displaced the confidence of both of them. He knew that he had been plainly unreasonable, first about the food, which was execrable, and then because Geraldine had not appeared to mind that some men who came in had recognised them and sent her a message of some irony in their greeting.

It had been when she laid down her fork and pushed away her plate that she had abruptly said: "I think our time's up; let's admit it," and had smiled noncommittally at his protests. It was vividly present to Cushing that he had not protested at her decision but at her lack of feeling. She could fling her conclusion at him in this way, he had said impatiently, and yet while she was reaching it she had contentedly made a good meal. She had been impatient in her turn and had answered him irritably and tersely. Yet just before she rose, across the fumes of the room and the trivial decorations of their little table, he had caught her eyes fixed on him. He wondered now—it was his sharpest reproach—why he had not seen that in the brightness of the look with which they clung to his there had flashed a sudden appeal.

X

AT his door he was told that Mrs. Cushing was at home and had had her tea in the library.

Cushing mounted the stairs with a strange sense of his return to a world where realities were scarcely as real as the realities in his mind. It was not until he laid his hand on the library door that it occurred to him that, for

the first time, he must compose his face before he saw his wife. The thought was effaced, a moment later, by the palpable absurdity of such concealments.

Anne-Marie was in front of the fire, her slim black figure sunk in one of his deepest chairs. Her feet, in elaborate slippers, rested upon the low fender; and Cushing's instinctive amusement at the invariable effectiveness of her attitudes was coupled with the vague annoyance he always felt with the inexcusably bad taste of her shoes.

She lifted her smile to his, with one long hand in the pages of her book.

"Ah, my dear! And you have had your tea? Some people came in; and since they left I have read and read. *Donc!* And have you amused yourself?"

Cushing had dropped into his usual chair, on the other side of the hearth. As he looked across at her, some accent in the banality of her words made him feel that she literally awaited his reply.

"Yes, I've amused myself, as you put it, after a fashion; though what amuses you wouldn't always amuse me."

"And what seems to me incredible would not necessarily be incredible to you," she supplemented instantly. "That we know. And what you have been doing—whatever it is—that also is included in the dissimilarities between us? Yes?"

Cushing hesitated an instant and then he stretched out his hand and took hers. He was still stirred by the revelation he had just seen, and the touch of Anne-Marie's smooth cool skin seemed like a vague reassurance. Yet it was while his hand lay on hers that he felt the lack of

any real significance in the gesture. It brought back to him the recollection of a corresponding sign he had made to her, a week or so before. It had been on a day when he had felt impelled to make a definite effort to bring her to closer terms with him. He had been stirred out of his habitual reserve by the loneliness which settled on him more and more heavily, and he had asked her to spend the afternoon with him and had taken her off to a concert. He had said to himself that he didn't care if her consent were perfunctory—that she must somehow understand the inner needs which made him appeal to her. Everything had tended to move him—the vast volume of sound in which individualities were dissolved, the strain of his own uncertainties, and most of all Anne-Marie's clear profile beside him, with her pale cheek showing its creamy tint against the black of her collar. She had fastened some red roses in her dress, and it struck him that he had lately told her that he liked them; and in the lull between two movements of a symphony he put out his hand and took hers.

There had been something disconcerting in the very quickness with which her own black-gloved hand returned the pressure of his. It had come to Cushing with a shock of astonishment that she felt his presence no more than she felt the music which again flooded the hall. She was correctly attentive, to it as to him, but where he felt in the majesty of sound the stir of all life, with its imminent sorrows and its desired happiness, she was unaware and deaf. He had had his own experience with her to prove that she felt, but she felt only the personal applications and allusions. To fuse herself with the needs and expressions of humanity at large was as for-

sign to her as to take the universe into her confidence. She simply didn't understand; and as they drove off together, after the concert, he had felt the dryness of his own manner return to match the perfect sincerity of the interest with which, as she looked out of the carriage window, she was commenting on the eccentricity of the winter fashions.

He knew that their difficulties were not always as intangible as this, and only the night before he had felt between them the discrepancy which comes when the forces which make a sympathy are too much worn and too uneven. To love her in certain ways was none the less to admit how difficult she was in others. Yet his basic loyalty was never firmer than when he even mentally questioned it; and the glance he now sent her softened.

"I wonder if I shall ever become accustomed to the fact that I've you to come back to! I never come in here without seeing you. I see you so vividly when you're not here. That's one of your astonishing ways—you fill a room with yourself. But I see, too, all the dull years I spent here without you——"

She had not spoken, but the incisiveness of her steady look was so definite that it arrested him.

"I suppose you will know if it is true or not—the rumour I hear that Mrs. Herring and Arthur Irish are to marry?" she asked.

"You've heard that?"

"I have heard it rumoured for some time, so far as rumour goes. Within the last day or so, I have heard it was definite."

He released her hand and sank back in his chair. "So

far as the definiteness goes—you've seen enough of Mrs. Herring, since she's been with Edith, to know she's not a definite person." He paused. "I've just now been at Edith's—I've been talking to Geraldine."

"Yes?" She had straightened herself, and he felt the play of her clear eyes on his face. "And why should you consider it necessary to tell me where you have been?"

Cushing smiled. "My dear, if your methods are simple they're also sometimes incredibly tortuous. I don't know why."

"Just as you frequently go to see other women; exactly! I see!" Her foot tapped evenly against the fender. "My dear Paul, you are far cleverer than I used to believe you!"

Her tone was still so light and so impervious that Cushing felt the awkwardness of his own quick resentment, and he tried to temper it.

"It's sometimes difficult to tell what meaning you want one to attach to what you say. You don't mean to make your tribute to my cleverness a little of an insult, but you do. I've had very little use for certain sorts of cleverness, thank heaven—for shifts or for evasions; and even less use for them when they're so well done that they succeed——"

Her silence again silenced him. She had continued to watch him without the slightest break in her inflexibility. "She sent for you, did she not?" she asked presently.

"Yes; Mrs. Herring sent for me—she wanted to see me; but——"

"But how do I know? Ah, those things declare themselves so easily! One does not even have to keep one's ears open to hear them."

"That's not the point—how you should hear them," he retorted quickly. "The point is that I won't permit you to think that there's any reason why you shouldn't hear everything that concerns me."

She nodded briefly, with her lips closely pressed together. "I see! And is she to marry Mr. Irish?"

He was annoyed to feel his colour rise. "Mrs. Herring's plans—I've told you so—are indefinite."

"You mean that you will not admit they are definite," she corrected him. "In your fantastic view, you've no right to tell me. Is that it? And why, pray, have you not the right? Why, with me, should you not admit it? Why should you be so careful where she is concerned? I can assure you that she is a woman who has not always either expected or received so much consideration!"

"She's a woman who deserves both my consideration and yours, and who shall have it," said Cushing dryly.

She had risen, and she nodded again, still with her perfect ease and with her smile only the faintest bit more strained. "So you will tell me nothing?"

"I'll tell you nothing!" His retort, Cushing heard, was as quick and as clear as her question. A moment later he began: "But, Anne-Marie, why should I tell you—or why shouldn't I tell you? Is it such a little thing, to trust a person as you've trusted me?"

She gave him a long, inscrutable look. He knew how well she could charge the mere message of her eyes with feeling, but he had never been as conscious of conflicting causes in her and of his own inability to name them. She gave him the impression that, with her constant dramatic sense, she took her time and waited to move until he had fully registered the fact of all that she

on her side registered. Then she walked across the room, and a second later the door had closed behind her.

Cushing continued to stand motionless, in his turn, with his eyes passing slowly around the familiar room. His perceptive sense reminded him that it would take a gradually built superstructure of clearer recollections to efface the thoughts with which the last few moments had peopled his surroundings. He had never before felt his wife so definitely and antagonistically distant. It was strange that Mrs. Herring should be the person to show him how actual and practical the distance was. Whenever he had thought of Geraldine before it had been with the secure sense of his own deep sentiment. Now he was confusedly aware that he had not the fact of an established feeling to compare to her and to make her show all her triviality. The unspoken criticism in his wife had disarranged all his landmarks, and for a moment he felt as if even the basis of his pity for what he had seen that afternoon had lost its sincerity and its certainty.

He broke away with an effort from the heaviness and confusion of his thoughts, and turned from the fireplace. As he moved his foot struck the French book his wife had dropped when she rose, and he bent to pick it up. Some impulse made him pause and turn the pages over, with an odd imaginative sense of their connection with his present state of mind. He had bought the book a few days before, with the vague purpose of refuting Anne-Marie's claim that he didn't read enough of the best writing in the world. Cushing, if he read sporadically, did so with some continuity of interest. In his younger days he had had his period of being amused by things of this type,

but with the last few years his amusement had lapsed into boredom. He required of a book some dignity of subject, and much of the modern French literature seemed to treat of the abnormal. He had never felt this more strongly than in reading the volume he now held, and he had closed it with the conclusion that all analysis resulted in neurosis. He had told Anne-Marie that it was a beastly book, on the same old themes, and that if she couldn't do better than that in her recommendations——! One of his constant mischances with her, as he had often granted, was that he was so frequently right, and he had on this occasion a pardonable pleasure in the fact that after she had looked the story through again she had acknowledged that it wasn't altogether a good specimen.

Yet what had astonished him most was that all her apology granted was that the book was not well done. Her intellectual separations in such matters and the natural honesty of a point of view which saw mental processes dispassionately always baffled him. Somehow her sincere incapacity to share his real objections had seemed to link her closer to the book. He was conscious that it had not been the presentation of such aspects of life which he resented. If one did not often meet them, in the usual run of events, one knew that they existed, and one knew too, with a certain amount of experience, how extravagant they were. The violent and the extraordinary were too extraneous to seem either reasonable or interesting. It was rather the odd relation between his wife and such a book which now pressed upon him for recognition. He could remember fleeting signs in her—a word, a gesture, the slow implications

of her intimate looks, which he could match to page after page of it, and which reminded him of nothing so much as of the expression which from time to time had glanced across Madame von Alfons' face.

He threw the volume down. It was she who had brought matters to a point of sordid and insidious distrust. The difference between them, he thought, was in the fact that if it had been he who distrusted her his distrust itself would have been nullified by all the loyalties which would rise to defend her.

XI

ANNE-MARIE leaned on the wall which edged the walk and looked out at the sweep of the river below her.

Her motor had set her down, ten minutes earlier, at a corner of the wide driveway, where she had found Arthur Irish awaiting her. She had not wavered in her greeting of him or in her acceptance of his unexpressed surprise. She had sent him the note, to which his presence here was so kind a response, she said, because there was something about which she most particularly wanted to see him. It was tiresome to drive, and what did he think of their leaving the roadway and crossing to the distant and more sequestered walk? All the more reason for their doing so, she had ended easily, since it was such a rarely charming afternoon, when the winter light was misty and full of greys and pinks.

It was as they paused beside the wall which bound the outer edge of the drive that she had become sud-

denly conscious of how little, in her action, she had taken into account Irish's personality. She knew that he was an example of one of those strange gradations in American life which have not yet reached the point of mellow shadings, but which are nevertheless definitely to be reckoned with. The Irishes belonged to the small class which had for some generations inherited money. They appeared to have escaped the first difficult struggle for existence and to have been definitely rich for so long that they had been placed beyond the usual contacts and the usual competition. If the habit of acquisition had come to be in his blood, she saw that it had educated Irish to a civilisation beyond his money. She had at first been unable to couple this pale, near-sighted young man with either the splendour of his Titians or the more delicate beauty of his Bouchers. The treasures of his collection argued that he must be some belated prince of the Renaissance, whose religion and whose moral was beauty. Yet it was one of the fantastic accidents in the development of a young country that his proved expertness should appear as desultory and formless as his careless walk, his drooping shoulders, and his absent and indifferent eyes. The power he disposed of had taught him appreciations rather than an inner glow. He achieved no more of an exterior than that of his mother, a plain, faded little woman, who, dressed in the simplest black, lived quietly in one of the corners of their palace. The constant training of his taste to discard all but the best had given him all the intellectual passions but no vital and personal experience of them; and the princeliness which should have been part of such a power as his

had come down to an assiduous pursuit of the long series of processes which mean culture.

The first sign which had made her understand both him and the particular quality of this culture had been the way in which his eyes, each time they had met, had been arrested by points in her which American men rarely saw. It had been a matter of thoughtful observation to her that if she were too dull for most of the women she saw she was too subtle for the men, and that she required too elaborate an appreciation for the usual person to trouble to waste time on her. She had at once seen that she held Irish's attention. It was not that she knew about his things and could talk about them—every woman he met could do that, he told her despairingly, and every school-girl instructed him. It was rather that she herself took her place as something in her way as good as the best of his works of art. He had learned a fundamental dependence upon style; and style ran through her, from the rare arrangement of her beauty to her precise speech, her carefully formulated thoughts and her formulated deduction of existence, with the smooth flow of a perfect sequence of character. She could touch here and elude there, and all for the purpose of making him feel what he most wanted to feel. It was not the too fluid attitude of most women, but rather a deep habit of nature in her which had as its single object the desire to please his sex. She had made allowances in Irish for the rich man's suspicion of women's predatory instinct; and it had been part of his response to her, on the few occasions when they met, that she could see it dissolved by her cool reserves and her cooler implications. It was

not only that she accepted with due appreciation the fact of his collections and his knowledge. She regarded the nourishment of such qualities of taste as a business where Irish himself had always been vaguely and indeterminately embarrassed by them. He had found, when they talked, that she respected his egoism, his trained intolerances, the fact that he had become, as she put it, a citizen of everywhere. She had always supplemented the suggestion, in talking to him, with the frank admission that he had after all achieved the beautiful and difficult life of the artist. People who were not as trained in taste as he, she had said, must be broad enough to see that even what it made him pay was part of the balance and composition of the whole.

She had rested on the wall the hands from which she had drawn her gloves, and she continued, for a moment or two, to look pensively out at the river. In her silence she had already become aware of the fact that Irish's attention was more closely fixed on her than she had ever felt it. She had none the less the impeccable air of detachment which always characterised her, but she knew that it was warmed with mute suggestions which, as he would be quick enough to feel, admitted him to something more intimate. It was characteristic of her that in spite of the clear purpose which penetrated all her mind like a hard brilliant light, her sense of effect and of the ways in which she could make her influence valid should yet persist and that her critical faculty was clear and alert.

"Ah, but what a country!" she exclaimed abruptly. "A scene like this—but it spreads all the spirituality of America out before one."

"Don't you know that the spirituality of America is very dull?" Irish returned with a smile. It added to his latent sense of enjoyment of her that, for whatever reason she had asked him to meet her, she should prepare the way for their talk by recognising the setting which surrounded them. "I must have told you before that if I couldn't sit in my library all day I should go mad!"

She gave him the sympathy of a quick smile. "But it is America which, to-morrow, will know everything! It is tremendous, this country; it is tremendous to found—do you say?—a nation on the sacred rights of man. We thought of it—ah, yes; we have thought of most things, we French; but it needs Anglo-Saxons to take their ideals seriously enough to suffer for them. Ah, how you love romance, you thin, nervous people!"

He protested, still smiling, that for his part his countrypeople seemed matter of fact enough; but she took him up quickly.

"But none the less you do not see facts. That is the reason you have no form—no sense of definition. It is like the American humour of which one hears so much; it is the humour of the grotesque, the extraordinary, not the humour of facts. And how clearly one must see facts before one can be amusing about them! Ah, but how it can make one suffer"—her voice changed suddenly—"your indirectness, your lack of definition!"

"I'm sure it's not easy, with your traditions, to adapt yourself to our loose ways. It's not always easy to put up with them when one belongs here. For my part——"

She took him up quickly. "No, you for your part are safe. You have enough talent to be unreasonable. You do not believe things something they are not. You

do not pay the penalties of these idealists who are convinced they are glorious but who are in reality so unwise; you do not want—do you?—to believe in unique loves, in undying sentiment, in the *coup de foudre*!” Her face darkened to match the change of her tone. “You are one of the fortunate people who gets so much of the experience of life without having to live it.”

Irish looked at her intently. He had noticed that it was one of her adroit ways to make what she said count by succeeding silences. The fact that she now turned away again seemed for a moment nothing more than her way of giving him time to see what suggestions her words had implied. Between him and the downward view of the river she was drawn in silhouette against the pale afternoon sky. He noted particularly the outline of her chin, so firmly and clearly modelled, and the tilt which the spirited carriage of her head gave to it. He had remarked before that she held her head unusually high and a little to one side, and that it was perhaps this trick, together with her mobile eyebrows, which gave her an air of defiant surprise in the face of the ignorances of the world.

Her very remoteness had always seemed to him to make most of her quality; and he was astonished to see, as she continued to stand with her head raised, as if she looked steadily at her own thoughts, that the lace on her dress rose and fell with the hurried intensity of her breathing, and that her lashes quivered against her cheek. All of him sprang to attention. He leaned towards her, along the wall. “There’s some difficulty, some trouble, which is on your mind. That’s why you asked me to come? Of course that’s why!”

She did not speak for a moment more. Then she turned to him, with a frank simplicity in the disclosure of her agitation. The intactness of her reserve—which, in some odd way, he felt to be as perfectly maintained—only added to the depths to which, as he saw, she was inwardly shaken.

“I may as well admit it to you: I am very miserable,” was all she said; and after a second she added briefly: “It seems strange, I know, and you—I am sorry for you too; but you are the only person who can act—who can in any way help.”

“I!” he broke out. “But, my dear Mrs. Cushing——”

She still kept the grave penetration of her glance upon him, with her eyes bright one instant and suffused the next. “You are to marry—to marry soon, I know; ah, no, don’t ask me how I know. Mrs. Herring has told many people by now. But there is something you must know—something which, if it ruins things for me, ruins them also for you.” The indeterminate emotion in her face seemed to set suddenly in a mould of resolve. “I have the best reasons for believing that the relation which once existed between Mrs. Herring and my husband has lately recommenced.”

Irish drew back a step, conscious of nothing but the quick revolt of his pride and his indignation. His thoughts ran rapidly back. He felt the blood hotly in his face as his gaze returned to his companion; and yet, in the stress of his feeling, he was struck anew by the pale intensity of hers, beneath her elaborate and careful form.

“You mean to say you know? You mean to say that something which before existed——”

"Yes; it existed before my marriage," she returned clearly.

"It existed before your marriage!" He wavered, in confusion. "Of course I know that Geraldine's life has been so broken up—poor soul! You mean to say——"

She inclined her head. "I know enough to have felt it only right to myself and to you to warn you. If it has not recommenced, it will recommence. You are to marry her; it is your right to know. That is why I came to-day; that is why I am making to you—who are almost a stranger to me"—he had never seen her hold her head higher—"this humiliating confession."

He struck the wall with his hand. "Then that's at last clear!"

It was her turn to face around, and he saw that the hardness in her expression had broken and dissolved again. "What is clear? Oh, what? Don't you see that that is what I most need—to be clear about it all? If you knew—if any one could ever know—what it has cost me!" She clasped her hands. "And I have foreseen it. I have felt it coming, day after day. I felt it, I think, before my husband did. Yes, he has gone back to her—thoroughly back to her. It has been an unfaithfulness which counted, an unfaithfulness of every feeling. No, it is too cruel that one should have to suffer like that!"

Her tears had overflowed and stood on her cheeks. Irish laid his hand impulsively on hers. "I'm sorry for you. It's hard for us both."

"For us both!" She shook her head. "No. It is hard only for me. You do not know how I have been

humiliated, how I have watched things drifting out of my hands. And it was all the harder because I could see it happening. If ever a man was ready for such a thing, it was my husband. He did not know it, but he was ready. He tried to deceive himself, but I understood. She had a power—an old, tried power—and she has used it. You—you must know more about it than I. You are engaged to her—you have watched her——” She paused.

“That’s just it.” He met her look fully. “I’m not engaged to her.”

“Not engaged to her! But yesterday you were; yesterday—ah, but yesterday a woman who came to see me had, within the hour, had a note from her to tell her so.”

“I’m giving you the facts.” Irish’s own confusion was mixed with an obscure sense of pity for her. “Mrs. Herring has broken our engagement.”

“Broken it!” She faltered and then drew herself up. “Do you consider, Mr. Irish, that I have a right to know the reason?”

“Yes; you’ve as much right as I myself—I see that.” He hesitated. “Mrs. Herring sent for me yesterday—it was very late in the afternoon, and she had suddenly decided to go away last evening. She told me frankly that she’d changed her mind, that she didn’t care for me as she’d have to care in order to marry me.” He turned away and added, more to himself than to her: “She’s always been frank enough—one’s got to grant her that.”

“Then she must have broken it”—he could see that she pieced the evidence together as he had pieced it together a moment before—“she must have decided to

break it because of what he said to her. She must have decided to act because of his influence. He was with her—he was there until half past five, until six. And when he came in he would tell me nothing—nothing.” The flash of feeling on her face was alive in its vividness. “Now do you need reasons—do you need proofs?”

The look she gave him and the sweeping gesture she made conveyed to Irish the sense that everything was said and that she had ended. But as she still paused beside him, and in spite of the problem which was presented by his own situation and by his pity for her, the selective sense in him was again obscurely aware of how she had made the scene count. He had never seen a woman so completely surrender to her feeling. Even her tears and the misery of her face had been shown him with the fullest abandonment. He had thought, vaguely enough, that he knew what jealousy meant as a fact, but he had never seen it so alive as an emotion or suspected that it was capable of causing such intimate pain. The contrast between the formality of her compact elegance and such a frank exhibition of herself might once, he recognised, have seemed to him too strained. But as he probed the expression with which she faced him, with her eyes wide, her lips just parted, and her hands raised, with the outspread fingers caught in the long chain around her neck, he felt that for the first time he understood the perfect sincerity of her and the sincerity and beauty of the way in which her outer and her inner self corresponded.

He looked away, down the river, to where a gigantic line of uneven chimneys, done in dull greys and smeared with the softness of sunset, was drawn across

the sky. The hills opposite, the shipping below them, the piers and factories, received a mellowing glow from the long column of red light which rested on the water. She had stirred in him the sense of drama in his own case. He felt all his imagination stimulated, and what had always seemed to him a hard, unyielding world dissolved for a moment and disclosed the infinitely fine parts of the human machinery which composed it.

XII

SHE had reached home only just in time to hurry to her room for a few moments before dining; and when she next confronted Cushing it was across the dinner table.

She could see, underneath his effort at consideration—the effort she had felt him to be ceaselessly making, since the night before—that he was drawing his usual dry conclusion that she was infallible in her judgment of what would most annoy him. Instead of one of her usual dinner dresses she had put on a dress of smoke-coloured grey, which reached up to her throat and down to her wrists, and whose very simplicity was an affectation. Around her shoulders she had wound what appeared to be a mist of grey tulle, held by a flower which matched her pallor, and to offset this she had rouged her lips the vividest red.

Cushing constantly thought, when she presented such an appearance, that he could plainly see the man of the boulevards who would most appropriately match her, and to-night he spared a brief smile to the reflec-

tion of his own incongruity, which he caught in an opposite mirror. He had been too persistently conscious of strain, in the last few hours, to be able to do more than to try to keep up, across the shining crystal and silver which separated them, an exchange of the most guarded courtesy. Yet as their dinner progressed it had struck him that there was some disregard of appearances in her which he had never yet seen. It showed in the shortness of her replies and in the fixity of her gaze, which looked indifferently beyond him and through him. He had long since become accustomed to the fact that her alert face remained incurious as to his inner feelings. But there now lay in her eyes a black shadow which he could not explain by her usual suggestion of dramatic intensity: a suggestion which he had insensibly come to discount, since it was so invariably well done and so invariably without foundation.

It was perhaps his sense of strain which made him keenly aware that the familiarity of the sombre room was like a friendly and unspoken reassurance. As he fell back in his chair and looked around, during one of their long pauses, he remembered that for this too she had had her quick comment. It had been one night, a few weeks ago, when he had dropped back in the same way and glanced about him with the same unconscious dependence, that she had tartly said: "Ah, Paul, I see what you are saying to yourself! You are saying: 'She enrages me, but my comfort is that after all I am right. All this is mine, and it too is right—the butler, the footman, the inherited silver, the heads of the animals I have killed. This is the standard, and

she is merely the person who has failed to agree with it.' I tell you that when you American men do not worship women you bully them. It is a vast harem of the west."

He had been amused, as he always was, at the amazing justice with which her light strokes fell. Yet as he watched her now he had never more sharply felt the danger of her astute formulas—of the way she could create or dissolve a determinate condition by the aptness of her power of expression. Her superficial agility had made him distrust her quick definitions as one of the chief causes of difficulty between them, as if she could place and accentuate their slightest differences by the turn of a phrase.

She preceded him without a word, when they left the room, and walked up the stairs to his library. He saw that she gave her usual quick glance to see that the coffee tray was beside the fire and that the servants had left; then she closed the door and, standing with her back to it, she turned on him the pale animation of her look.

"There is no need for any preliminary," she said clearly; "I want to tell you that I know."

Cushing paused and pushed away the box of cigars over which, on the large centre table, he had bent. He confronted her gravely but he did not speak.

"I know," she continued, with the clarity of her voice as strained but as definite, "that what I suspected yesterday is a fact."

Cushing still maintained his silence. He could not have defined it, but what she said seemed to matter less, in some inexplicable way, than her vast appeal to his sympathy—than the fact that his wife, to whom he

had promised so much, should by any of the blunders and inconsequences of life have been brought to this point of unhappiness. He took an abrupt step forward and paused.

"My dear, it's not been fair of me to let things hurt you like that. But you, too, you're unfair."

"Unfair? I am wretched," she made one of her extravagant gestures, "if that is being unfair."

"But you've not trusted me."

"Trusted you!" Her eyes flew up to his. "Does one trust a man about whom one has proof?"

"I should have trusted you against proof," he broke out, but she took him up quickly.

"Ah, I have finished with them, those vague ideas of honour. You went to Geraldine Herring, you made her break her engagement. Why? I, for my part, am not so blind that I do not see, and to-night I shall leave you." The vivid fixity of her look held for a moment longer; then she covered her face with her hands and murmured brokenly: "But how hideous it all is—how hideous, how hideous!"

Cushing's expression had crystallised to a hardness to equal hers.

"Yes, and it's you alone who've made it so—you who have put on us both these miseries and humiliations. That you could so distort, that you could torture and twist—it's incredible! No, it's not incredible. It's the habit of mind in you, the instinct to search out such complications——" He interrupted himself. "But how did you search them out?"

She was silent for a second. He watched the hands she had dropped from before her face—he had learned

that with old races the hands are full of betrayal—and he saw that they hesitated in their motions. “It is of very little consequence to you how I know. I do know,” she repeated. “But whatever happens I have spoilt her chance. Ah, what a debt I owe her! How she has pretended that she had no further interest in you—how she has used her friendship with Edith! Poor Edith—who thinks because she knows what has existed between you that she at the same time knows everything else about such a woman! She has hidden behind her frankness, her indifference, the fact that she rarely saw you. But I have paid her something back, at last. I have prevented her marriage, and it is not possible she will ever have a chance like it again. Arthur Irish knows about her now.”

“Knows? What do you mean?” He had taken another step nearer to her. “What does Irish know?”

“Everything!” She flung the word at him. “Everything there is to know—what happened before, what Mimi told me, long ago, in Paris, and what is happening now. He knows that he has you to thank for losing her. I have seen him this afternoon and I have told him.”

She ended with a last flash of defiance and waited. She had never seen Cushing’s face so crossed and re-crossed as it was by conflicting feelings. At the back of her thoughts there was the strange sense that they were inspired not by the fact which concerned Mrs. Herring and Irish, but by what she herself had done.

“It’s not possible,” he said, in a low tone. “It’s not possible that you should have done nothing more or less than dishonour yourself.”

"Dishonour myself?" Her voice shook and then rose.

"Yes. Dishonour yourself. You've employed weapons decent people don't admit."

Anne-Marie's eyes had fastened on his extended hand, and she saw that as he paused again he had clenched it as tightly as if his impulses of anger had reached a point beyond actual control. The sense of such scenes was natural enough to her to make her aware of a faint physical fear. Yet it baffled her as she had never before been baffled that she could not foresee Cushing's feeling at such an important moment—that his instinctive disgust would probably express itself in a contemptuousness which was beyond violence.

The longer Cushing paused the more her uncertainty mounted. He finally turned away, with a brief gesture, as if he had reached a conclusion from which there was no appeal. "There's nothing more to say. If you've been capable of that," his tone was still low, "you're capable of anything."

"I am capable of anything! A woman who has been so humiliated and debased is capable of anything. No, I tell you she will not so easily rebuild her life—at least not with Arthur Irish; and if she tries to rebuild it with you——"

Cushing turned back, with his hand again raised. "Anne-Marie, you don't know what you're saying. You've said, heaven knows, enough."

"And you? Do you owe it to me to say nothing?"

"Nothing." The tension of his look made her turn paler. "You've lost the claim to my consideration. If your decency can't tell you——"

"And why?" She had moved forward too, so that

now they stood close to each other. "Why should you interfere with her marriage? Why should you want her not to marry? Why should she accept your interference? Tell me that! Is it a lie, then? Am I wrong?"

"Doesn't every inch of you tell you that you're wrong? It's I who am wrong—who from the first have been wrong—to believe you capable of anything better than this. It's not your accusation—it's mine."

"Then what was the reason for her accepting your interference? You did interfere—you must have. And why should you defend what she said as a confidence—a confidence which you saw I misunderstood? There could have been only one reason, granted your strange notion of what is just and unjust—there could have been only one reason for your protecting what she said as you have protected it." She paused. "No, but I see it! It is that between you and her there is something—something which exists now, something which is at all costs to be spared."

Cushing's expression had now hardened to a point beyond admission or negation. "There is. Something which not even suspicions like yours can ruin——" He broke off and waited for a moment.

"I am going—I am going now," she said quickly. "I suppose you understand that." She struggled with her rising sobs. "Do you think I can spend another night under your roof? Ah, but I should hope not! I shall get my things together, and you can send them after me. I shall leave you everything you have given me—my pearls, my rings, everything. If you have no decency you can give them to Mrs. Herring."

She moved towards the door. Cushing's eyes in-

evitably turned and followed her. As she stood, with her head lifted, in the clear light, something in her struck him with the intensity of a revelation. He had supposed that he had just had the final and degrading proof that her powers of feeling, apart from their prescribed manifestation, were transient and merely instinctive. The havoc of her face gave a sudden width to them. He guessed it had been his last, and perhaps his worst, misadventure that he had not realised in time, and before she had had her chance to drag everything to such an abasement, that it was not only an instinct but all her instincts which were merged in the sweep of so irresistible an emotion. His thoughts flashed back to their talk in the Norman orchard, when her questions to him had seemed only one of her simulations of form and as far as possible from the warm spontaneity of jealousy. The depth and the quality of her capacity was for the first time manifest to him as they were about to part: the constant irony of their attempt at understanding revealed the fact with a hard precision.

She moved suddenly, and with a wide gesture she drew off her wedding ring and held it out to him. For a second Cushing felt himself intimately stirred; but as he continued to hesitate she flung the ring across the room to his feet, and in an instant the significance of her act had been lost in her invariable suggestion of theatricality.

XIII

ONE afternoon at the end of the same week, Anne-Marie sat by the window of her little sitting-room, in one of the quieter hotels, and watched the events of the past days crystallise into the hard outlines of reality.

Since the night of her arrival it seemed to her that her thoughts had moved to and fro in vacuity. Her mind resembled nothing so much as the blankness of Cushing's closed door, which, as she had descended the stairs, had appeared the final expression of his parting with her. It was true that for some hours afterward she had been deeply shaken, with her imagination in the flame-like state which distorts the past and illuminates the present into new values. The fact of her assured immunity from any present contact with Cushing and their problem was at first all her thoughts could grasp. She had been immensely tired, and as soon as she had unpacked she had gone to bed, hoping that her sleep would prolong itself far into the next day. But she woke at dawn; and in the grey light the fireless bedroom took from her circumstances their last vestige of uncertainty.

The truth was, she began to see, as her eyes grew more accustomed to the inner perspectives, that she had acted on the authority of a custom strange to her. In her own code, what had happened was no adequate reason for her being alone, living at an hotel, with every freedom suddenly granted her. Cushing's tacit refusal to interfere with the execution of her decision

was as unaccountable to her as the fact that, because of one acute circumstance, she could have brought about the rupture of their marriage. The independence which her husband's idea of honour granted to the woman who considers herself wronged seemed alien and artificial to her. The fact that there was no tradition in her present surroundings to hold her back had made it possible for her to subdue her native scruples and to leave him. The laxity of the American laws of conduct already made the fact that she broke them lose half its affront. She realised now how completely she had viewed her marriage as an exception and outside the exactions and regulations to which she was accustomed. The localism of her own view had always continued, in a half-acknowledged way, to regard it as impossible. If she had married in France, she knew how long she must have wavered between the rights and wrongs of her release, and that if it had forced itself upon her it would not only have come gradually, with the insistence of a demand which could no longer be suppressed, but also according to set rules of acceptance and discrimination.

Yet as the days had worn themselves on and as she tried to collect herself—over her meals, in the close dark dining room or sitting beside the window, where, through fold after fold of greyish lace, she could look out at the corrugated sea of roofs below her—she realised how intimately the past two years had influenced her. The comparative exiguity of her quarters had begun to draw together, into precise boundaries, her vague vision of her future. It had been when she struggled with the problem of these adjustments that she first

understood that she had been insensibly affected by the habit of luxury. For the first time since her marriage, she thought ironically, she would have an outlet for her shrewd capacity to manage. The details of her installation—the contrast between the furniture whose ornateness could not disguise the signs of transient use, with the elaborate articles she had disposed around her—pressed her with the hard, inelastic value of money. She knew that in this complex civilisation the luxuries she most prized, those of privacy and simplicity, must be bought. Already she felt an intense distaste for the equivocal impressions her presence here must produce and for the curiosity of furtive glances.

Cushing had sent his secretary to her the day after her arrival, merely with instructions to ask for her instructions. The half hour she spent with him remained one of the most intimately disagreeable she had ever passed. The manifestation of her husband's generosity in the matter of the income he offered her only added to her incomprehension. She was aware of her instinctive revolt against anything approaching the usual conditions in such cases. She knew that her own countrywomen had at times to make such compacts and that her reluctance was probably extravagant and unreasonable. But her keenest sense was that she could never foretell Cushing's reserves of opinion, and the thought that he could believe her capable of the easy acceptance of divorce and of all its vulgar necessities, as they existed in his own race, was intolerable to her pride. She had therefore sent him, by his messenger, the briefest kind of note. Her cousin, Madame von Alfons, was to be in New York before long, she wrote, and she

would consult with her about the steps she would take to dissolve their marriage. Meanwhile it was her intention to live on her own diminutive income.

She was conscious that something of the force of her abasement had found its way into her letter. Cushing had always put aside her easy verbal interpretations of what she felt as florid and specious; and when she wrote: "to be under any further obligation to you would be a form of intimate suffering for which I do not now possess the courage," she knew that at last one of her statements would convince him. The even more marked briefness of his answer proved this to her. He had not the privilege of forcing any of his wishes on her, he replied, though he believed and would continue to believe that he owed her everything.

She was obscurely grateful for the forms his consideration took and for this imaginative quality in him. Yet it was the cause of her worst difficulty. The fact that Cushing could so enlarge existing facts—that he had regarded unfaithfulness not only as unfaithfulness to the letter but to the spirit of a compact—widened the extent of his offence. Her inborn recognition of the tenacious influence of human relationships had helped the progress of her pain. She could conjure up the smallest of the circumstances which had held him and Mrs. Herring together, with an elaborate exactness which came from her inheritance and her training. It was difficult for her to face the conclusions of so deep a personal resentment; and her worst suffering, as she had sadly granted, had been in a way which her husband could least of all have understood.

His insensibility was the most penetrative and in-

sidious of the wounds he had dealt her. The best American standards had proved to her that a man could not easily and honestly divide his allegiance, and the failure of her marriage had consequently weakened her faith in herself and in her own powers. She had even the obscure sense that she herself was to blame for the fact that Cushing had seen all her qualities of enchantment without enough appreciation to overcome his own prejudices. She knew that, whatever he believed concerning her own actions, it would be instinctive with him to search his conduct through and through for points in their relation where he had failed. It was her counterpart to this, she supposed, that she reproached herself for not having better employed the methods in which she had most faith. However she sifted the matter and however she tried to test all the falsities of its adjustments, she was sardonically aware that she invariably ended with the conclusion that if she had somehow managed to be more charming Mrs. Herring's influence would have been ineffectual. The admission of such a failure contracted all her future to the immanent realities in the depressing rooms, in which the light of the pale winter days struck no answering reflections.

Mrs. Sale had come to her immediately after her arrival and had been exceedingly kind, though Anne-Marie's wit reminded her that kindness so definitely pursued had a disturbing suggestion of relentlessness. She had instantly dreaded that Edith might try to make her reconsider her decision, and she knew that her sister-in-law's power would be in the direct force of her goodness and of her sincerity. "Paul's told me noth-

ing—absolutely nothing; and above all you must understand that I don't come with any plea. He wouldn't let me come, indeed, unless I promised in no way to try to coerce you. I know only that you left him because you were gravely unhappy. That," Mrs. Sale had put it plainly, "was exactly what he asked me to say. He feels that, whatever turn things have taken, it's his fault that you weren't happy enough. He says he was wrong to let you reach the point where you made such mistakes. If you'll believe me, I think it's the fact of his own failure which is hardest for him; that, and your unhappiness."

Anne-Marie had met this with a long stare of surprise. She understood Edith well enough to see how hard it must be for her, even with the protection of her ignorance, to show such generosity where her brother's wife was concerned. She had long since divined that it was peculiarly difficult for Mrs. Sale to deal with a person of whose powers of appreciation she was uncertain. She knew that she particularly tried Edith's patience—less by her ignorance of all the usual woman's interests and attitudes than by her disconcerting flashes of astuteness. But whatever Mrs. Sale guessed or ignored of the situation, Anne-Marie recognised at once the impossibility of correcting her suppositions. The revelations she had made to Arthur Irish had excused themselves to her as an inevitable part of her jealousy; where Mrs. Sale was concerned, she was restrained not only by her meticulous sense of propriety but by her recognition of Edith's kindness, and she determined to say nothing.

She hesitated for a moment. The only reasonable

deduction she could make, as her mind passed rapidly from premise to premise, was that Cushing would naturally continue to occupy a position where he could stand between Mrs. Herring and any disclosure.

"But you—naturally you take his part. Even against the facts, when you know them, you will think me to blame. Of course Paul will not directly admit it, but he asked you to see me because he hoped you would somehow persuade me to reconsider a decision which would save every one a scandal. Is that it?"

"No, that's not it." Mrs. Sale's usual decisiveness of manner softened. "My poor child, you've been through enough, I'm sure, to make you doubt us. Paul insists that you have a right to make in every way your own decisions. I don't pretend to you that he says you're right. He says you're deeply and fundamentally wrong—you know best why."

Anne-Marie had hesitated again, in the stress of her conflicting impulses. "But it is too extraordinary! He denied and denied to me what I accused him of. Yet because of his idea that he was somehow to blame in permitting me to be so unhappy, he is content to acknowledge himself partly in the wrong. And did he tell you why?" She had felt her face harden. "Did he tell you why he was telling you, as you say, absolutely nothing?"

Edith returned her look steadily. "Yes, he did. He said it was scarcely fair to you—considering the form your suspicions had taken—to tell even me of them." She watched the blood flame quickly up in Anne-Marie's cheeks, and then she laid her hand on her arm. "I don't want to be wrong and unkind—haven't I shown you

that? I've been through these things myself, my dear. You mustn't lose courage; you must remember that there is always so much to live for."

Anne-Marie, who was now pale again, watched her gravely. "So much to live for——? But is there?"

"Ah, there's everything! You'll see; you and Paul are still young, and time does such wonders."

"Yes, you believe in time, I know. I am not sure that I do. Time changes situations of course, but it scarcely changes character. And are lives really remade? Somehow one doubts it——"

She broke off, with a sense of the hopelessness of any comparison between herself and Edith. Mrs. Sale, whatever her own experiences, had not the instinct but only the theory of such a problem. The refinements of the difficulty, which kept Anne-Marie sensitive to the least implication against her own dignity, were non-existent in the light of such a clear, open view. She remembered the extraordinary ease with which her sister-in-law alluded to Sale and her relegation of him to one of the numerous causes which so occupied her. Edith probably felt a definite advantage over her, for the first time in their relationship. She had weakened herself by her failure with Cushing. Mrs. Sale was after all at home in a situation in which Anne-Marie was strange; she managed it competently because she did not understand it. With a faint flare of amusement, Anne-Marie realised that Edith was protected by the indelicacy of her ignorance as she herself would never be protected.

She had looked away from Edith and her eyes had travelled around her sitting room and its gilt decora-

tions, with a sudden distaste. For the first time it seemed to her to give an impression less of ugliness than of the specious and equivocal. Her thoughts turned to Mrs. Sale's drawing room. She had always felt that its vaguely restless air had been due to the fact that the tapestries, the embroideries, the good *faïence* and the admirable Italian carvings must be indubitably surprised to find themselves in a New York apartment house. Now she dreaded the suggestion, as if it reminded her of one of the penalties of a rootless and disintegrated life. She would soon be like Edith, and it would soon be outwardly apparent, she supposed, that nothing was left her but forced interest. Her maid was lingering at the door, waiting to show Mrs. Sale out. She had only lately engaged the woman, less for the respectability of her appearance than for the pleasure of being able to speak French to her. It struck her now that Cushing had said that she was the kind of maid possible only on the stage, and that as one examined her more critically her aprons had too many frills and her eyes were both inept and sly. As she turned back to Edith, to wish her good-bye, she understood that the hardest penalty of her position was the loss of her former confident sense of an unapproachable distinction.

XIV

SHE had reached this point in her reflections and had turned from the window and thrown herself listlessly into a chair, before the incandescent bluish

glow of the gas fire, when the sharp ring of the telephone bell in the hall brought her suddenly to her feet.

Since her arrival at the hotel she had seen no one except Mrs. Sale and one or two necessary messengers; and even before her maid, who had answered the call, turned to her with the information that a lady asked to speak to her before she ventured to be shown up, Anne-Marie felt the rise of her perturbation. She went to the instrument and held it to her ear, with a sudden quiver of her heart. The voice she heard, hurriedly speaking, seemed to convey to her little beyond the press of her own agitation. She heard herself say: "Yes—I will see you. I understand—it is Mrs. Herring. Yes, if you wish it I will see you," and she turned back again into the sitting room with the same strange lack of belief in the reality of anything except the unreasoning pang of her suffering.

She had paused in the centre of the room, aware that she had never before made so vital an effort to control herself. If she could maintain the carriage of her head, the steadiness of her eyes and the rigidity of her clasped hands, it seemed to her that these would be the outward and symbolic signs of her grasp of the situation. There was a mirror on the opposite wall, and as her reflection flashed out at her she felt that she saw scarcely herself, but, in the dark upright figure, the actual embodiment of the feeling which possessed her.

The doors of the lift in the hall opened and closed, and a moment later Mrs. Herring came in from the corridor. She turned to shut the door behind her and then advanced to where Anne-Marie stood.

"I had to see you; I suppose you understood that. I'm just back—just half an hour since, from the station. I went straight to Edith and tried to talk to her. Of course I've heard, since I've been gone, that something was wrong between you and Paul. But while Edith talked—oh, it wasn't anything she said, it was just my own unreasoning suspicion—a suspicion I couldn't bear. So I left her. I came, on the spur of the moment, to see if you'd see me and explain away what I fear." She hurried on, with her voice clear and low in spite of her breathlessness. "Am I in any way the cause of your leaving Paul? That's what I want to know; that's what, whether you like it or not, you've got to tell me."

Anne-Marie's thoughts seemed for a moment unable to reach beyond her gratitude for the fact that she could return a look which was flawlessly cold to the feeling with which Geraldine's eyes searched her face.

"You are asking me a question, I understand. You can scarcely expect me to reply until you have acknowledged by what right you ask it."

"And if I acknowledge my interest in the matter, I commit myself? Is that what you mean? But you see," Mrs. Herring continued, still with her suggestion of an assumed recklessness and an inner fervour, "I don't happen to care how I commit myself. You're very quick; I'm not as quick, but my position's stronger." Her eyes met Anne-Marie's directly. "You've got so much more to lose than I."

She had spoken without the slightest shade of either irony or reproach, and the directness of the words, even more than the sense of any trespass on her own

dignity, was what for a moment arrested Anne-Marie's reply. "If you have come here to discuss my feelings——" she began.

Geraldine's look had strayed over the room, and it returned to Anne-Marie with a sudden impatience. "But why on earth should I have come, unless we could discuss your feelings? What exists, except how your feeling acts on Paul and Paul's on you? That's the whole reason for my speaking to you—for my appealing to you, if you prefer. I knew that unless you still cared for Paul you would never have behaved as you have behaved."

Anne-Marie was conscious that the intensity of her effort for composure insensibly weakened. Her thoughts had become dark and obscure instead of clear and hard. Her penetrating sense of personal injury was still as acute as her detestation of such a scene—for which, as her perceptive irony had registered, Geraldine, in the elaborate exaggeration of her appearance, so aptly looked the part. But in spite of her resentment of her own wrong and her resentment of everything about Mrs. Herring, from her loose yet imperative manner to her subtle lack of distinction, she had to grant that Geraldine had, at the moment, the force of sincerity. Even an interview of this nature, in her own code, had prescriptions and rules for its very violence. The directness with which Geraldine had turned her own conclusion upon her made her colour rise.

"What is it you want to say to me? I am scarcely prepared to discuss my husband, or my relation to him, with you." Her head rose higher. "But if you feel

that you care to discuss with me your relation with him, that is your affair. I suppose I must acquiesce."

"You suppose you must acquiesce, and make the mental reservation that I'm indelicate and indecent? Well, make it; I can't say I mind much. All I do care about is that you should know what really exists between Paul and me; because, of course," she finished, as if more to herself than to Anne-Marie, "that's what is at the bottom of it all."

Anne-Marie waited again. "Yes! That is at the bottom of what has happened, if you want to know it. Ah, but of course you know it—you knew it! A woman who does the kind of things you do foresees the consequences."

Geraldine's impatience showed again. "But of course I didn't foresee the consequences! I didn't foresee any consequences. I'd been seeing Paul for months—ever since I've been so much with Edith, practically ever since your marriage. Haven't you guessed that I didn't foresee the consequences, since the consequences for myself—in a view like yours, which takes so much account of the chances of a good match—weren't particularly fortunate? No," she turned away and continued with the same energy, "I honestly didn't. I'd honestly thought I could marry. I sent for Paul because of that; you can believe it or not, as you please, but I shouldn't have talked to him, that day, unless I'd really believed myself settled and sure. Well, I was wrong. It was my own misjudgment. Understand—Paul had nothing whatever to do with it. He never even suspected the truth—the truth which I, on my side, had continued to live by. And I suppose," she turned back

again, with a faint mockery, "that you think there is only one reason that a man like Paul defends a woman!" She stopped for a moment and then she added briefly: "How extraordinary that you shouldn't have known him better than that!"

Anne-Marie felt the finest nerves of her pride stir at the touch. "If you think that you are at liberty——" she began.

Geraldine caught her up. "It's you yourself who have given me the liberty. Oh, I guessed it before I knew it. It was you who went to Arthur."

The colour had faded from Anne-Marie's face. "In the same situation I should do so again. If I dare to let myself think of what I have had to bear——"

"But you've not for an instant supposed I didn't understand that! It was that," Mrs. Herring spoke as directly as before, "which made me so immensely sorry for you. At first, of course, I wasn't. I'd my own difficulties to think of, and when Arthur finally let me see what he'd been told—he followed me down to Washington and I saw him there yesterday—I knew it must be you who had done it. I've had my own frank talks with Arthur before now, and he knows well enough what to think of me. But I shouldn't have chosen to have this reach him in this way, when his own feelings were raw and resentful. As I tell you, I thoroughly hated what you'd done; but when I began to see, when I began to get at the truth, I understood why you'd done it. You see that after all," her smile gleamed faintly, "we were in the same dilemma."

Anne-Marie waited, conscious that the confusion of her thoughts had reached a point beyond speech. In

spite of her rigorous resolve, she was obscurely moved. She was intellectually too just not to see that this was not the Mrs. Herring of trivial affectations; or rather that she was the same woman beneath whose trivial affectations there lay the hard wisdom of experience. It did not matter how she had behaved; she had evidently felt. Anne-Marie was accustomed to the potency of quick and brilliant emotions, but not to their conversion—and especially by a person of such exterior—into a forceful steadiness. For a moment the strange blend, in her companion's face, of resistance and indecision, of patience and impatience, held her attention rivetted.

"What do you mean," she presently asked, "by the same dilemma? You mean to grant, I suppose, that you love my husband?"

"It's of very little consequence to me what I grant. If you want me to put it into words, it's just that when he and I broke things up, three years ago, he no longer cared for me and I—well, with me it was different. You've left me very little to myself, between you all. It's only Paul who's understood—and without my ever asking him to understand—that there are things one doesn't finger and turn over. That's the only thing I can't forgive you"—Geraldine stopped—"that you hadn't the sense to see why he shielded me, and to let everything else go."

"Does one let such things go, with such a past behind them?" Anne-Marie broke out. "Do you forget that? You will be telling me next that what happened between you and Paul before our marriage——"

Geraldine took up her phrase, with a perceptible

stiffening of her face. "I'll tell you about what happened before your marriage exactly nothing."

"What does that affirm or deny? What do you expect me to understand from it?"

"I don't expect you to understand much; you haven't, all along, understood anything." She spoke without rancour but with the same directness. "All I mean is that about that part—about what happened before—you've nothing to say. I've laid everything which in any way concerns you frankly before you. If you can't see what Paul's felt for you—and I'm not sure that you can—that's your own affair. I've had to make what I've felt for him your own affair too, since if I hadn't you'd never have understood it. But what happened before belongs to me; not to him, because he didn't particularly make it belong to him, but to me. It's finished, it's over with." Her eyes softened and wavered again, and their message to Anne-Marie ended in the uncertainty of her smile. "I've something you'll never have, and which I don't mean to give you," she ended.

She turned and walked towards the door; at the threshold she paused and faced around again.

"There's one thing you owe me, and that is to tell him that you were wrong—that you believe me."

Anne-Marie's words seemed to come without her will but with the conviction of finality. "Yes; I do believe you," she answered.

XV

ANNE-MARIE had hesitated, after Mrs. Herring left her, only long enough to look at her watch and to make a quick comparison between the hour and her knowledge of Cushing's habits. She had then hurriedly put on her hat and furs, and a moment later she went out of the hotel.

It was that time of the winter afternoon when the first changing of the light filled the streets with early dusk. As she walked quickly along, the contact of the keen air and the brush of the crowds became part of the stimulus of her definite and decisive energy. To her reawakened perceptions the ebb and flow of the movement on the pavements assumed the same shifting significances as the ebb and flow of the suggestions in the faces which streamed past her. Her sense of life was sharpened to a point where each sensation of touch and sight had the quality of a revelation. It was a revelation which affected her, like all her revelations, only personally. The fact that her problems were identical with other problems scarcely touched her. She had an aristocracy of attitude, in regard to all identities of standpoint, in which Cushing had always been amused to see a compound of childlike ignorance and astute cynicism. It was rather that the pale glimmer of the western sky, the darkness which displaced it, the gradual cessation of light and the gradual rise of the shadows which enriched and blackened the streets, the touch of one hand on the other in her muff and the touch of the silky hairs of the fur which blew against

her cheek, became integral parts of her relation to her problem.

Her single desire was to acquit herself at the earliest possible moment of her moral debt to Mrs. Herring. She could not have named a single proof which had determined her belief in Geraldine's sincerity. But it was nevertheless positive and final. If she was conscious, beneath the clear resolve of her present confidence, of a faint surprise that she should have been so convinced, it was a surprise more caused by her own actions than by Mrs. Herring's. In looking back at the past two years she had for the first time a sense of chances missed, of opportunities unperceived and importances evaded. Yet in spite of the genuineness of her admissions she recognised the superiority of her own situation to Geraldine's. To see Cushing through other eyes, and to have the proof of the tribute which Mrs. Herring's feeling had continued to pay him, accentuated her sense that she had had possession of deep places in his sentiment of which no one else would ever suspect the existence. However she might have failed to maintain such a claim, she knew now that it was beyond another woman's reach. The very aggressiveness with which Mrs. Herring had talked to her—and though she frankly acknowledged it had gained its point—was a proof of limitations which were the greatest factor in the consolation of her jealousy. Her confidence had warmed her eyes and quickened her breath when she turned into Cushing's street.

There were numberless signs—the surprise of the butler's face, the disturbingly familiar air of the hall and of Cushing's letters and gloves on the table by the

door, the ceremony with which she heard herself ask to be shown to the library to wait until her husband should come in—all of which accentuated her consciousness of the peculiarities in her errand. She had never felt more completely the alien in regard to every side of Cushing's life, and as she noted this she was struck, too, by the charm her removal from it had lent the house—the indescribable charm, she supposed, which hangs about every man who lives with a declared independence of a woman. Her sense of rooms was as keen as her sense of people, and the close scent of books and of wood smoke, the low lights and the reflexions of the fire in the brown and green tints of the leather chairs, raised before her, in a second, the recollections which had so peopled and furnished the place. She had always spoken to Cushing of his favourite room as one whose luxuries were extravagant rather than comfortable. It was without the soft charm which can lend a bloom and a grace even to shabbiness and depletion. Now the room seemed to her exactly that—softer, and full of unseen presences and demands.

She had gone to the desk, with an instinctive impulse to loosen the roses which had been placed there with the awkward precision of a servant's hand. The sight of her husband's writing materials and of the familiar covers of his note books and letter cases touched her memories as penetratingly as the touch of the leather against her fingers. Their separation had marked for her the boundaries of their mental separation, and she felt keenly conscious of all the privacies in him which she had never penetrated. She found herself wondering not only how he had lived, during days which had

been so driftless for her, but also how he had lived since their marriage—how he had combined the inner needs of which she now began to have a vague sense with the requirements of his outer life. She raised her eyes and looked around her again; there had been ways, in spite of everything, in which she had satisfied him. Now that she was free from the pressure of their different interpretations, she could smile as she remembered the profound forms his satisfaction had taken. After all, she thought, the interview she was about to have would differ from the one she had just had in that there was an undeniable difference between her power to affect a woman and her power to affect a man.

As she waited it struck her as strange that the accident of his delay, beyond the usual hour at his office, should put to the test of reflection the impulse on which she had acted. She was aware that she did not want to reflect. When she had left the hotel, and during her short and hurried walk, she had made it a point with herself that she should not consider her next step. She knew that in most lives the privileged moments were rare when one could yield to an emotion so large that its cost was recognised and acceptable. One of those turning points presented itself to her. The maturity of her power of such judgments assured her that she would rarely be in a position where her unconditional surrender would yield her so much. She did not deny the costs of the issue or its importance—indeed, its single importance, in her own experience. When she had married it had been inevitable that her personal feelings should easily adjust themselves to what

was the plainest expediency. Marriage was not, as she had reminded herself, the issue which involved the issue of the feelings. Now it seemed to her that the decision of all her life, as a question of conscious choice, hung for the first time in the balance.

She had continued to stand, one hand resting upon the desk and one hand pressed to her heart, absorbed in an expectancy which reached its keenest point when she heard Cushing's step in the hall outside and the sharp note of his voice. A moment later he opened the door and came in; and even with the betrayal of his visible effort for composure, she felt the faint drop which the shock of actuality brought about in her own mood.

"Benson told me you'd come—I'm sorry you had to wait," he began instantly. "If I'd known——"

"I did not know myself, until half an hour ago, that I should have to see you," she returned; and she added, with her invariable ceremony, "I hope that you had no engagement, that I am not interfering——" She broke off. Cushing's light flush, as he stood in the nearer circle of the lamp on the desk, moved her like his obvious preoccupation and inattention. She felt herself flush in return, and she was even conscious of the half-formed resolve to step forward and give him her hand. Then she saw that his face changed and set in its familiar lines of a dryly humorous indifference. She could almost phrase to herself the kind of comment which must be passing through his mind. She could present herself like this, with the attitude of all her beauty so charged with meaning, and yet it had been his experience that part of the quality of her surprises was

that they might concern nothing more important than the hour at which she should dine.

She gave a quick sigh. After all, she thought, with her irony turning on herself, she had gone through enough loneliness, in the past week, to make it a pleasure to see again even the easy fit of his clothes and the competent motions of his hands, and she could think of even a quarrel with him with some satisfaction.

"Yes, I wanted to see you," she pursued; "I found, indeed, that I must see you. I am sure you will know why. This afternoon, an hour ago, Mrs. Herring came to me."

"Geraldine went to you?" He was evidently held, for a moment, by his surprise. "Ah, I didn't count on her doing that!"

"You count on none of us; you are the one who, all along, lives for yourself, are you not?" Her tremulous smile was accentuated now by the rise of her eyebrows. "Well, there it is. She came to tell me—to prove to me—that I was wrong, that what I suspected was unfounded and untrue."

She waited for a moment. The grave steadiness of Cushing's look showed her how deeply he was moved and she felt again a fugitive flash of jealousy.

"You think it was admirable of her?" she asked. "You admire the conduct she has pursued in regard to me? Yes, that I understand."

"I think that all that's necessary for you to understand," he spoke deliberately, "is your own mistake. We both benefit immensely by Geraldine's generosity; the best return we can make is not to discuss it. It

can't be what one wants—in a situation like hers”—he hesitated—“to be discussed.”

“Of course it was generous of her—that I admit. And I myself—I was perhaps hasty and ungenerous. I do not wish to be so now. I want you to understand how fully I see my mistake; that I acknowledge that, whatever may have happened in the past, so far as my accusation went I was wrong.”

“Yes; fatally wrong,” said Cushing briefly.

“It is not my habit to shirk the necessary admissions.” Her shoulders rose and fell. “Yes, she was generous; she was even kind, in her incredible way. For my own part I cannot see her as anything except incredible. Her taste, in moral matters at least, is untrustworthy. But you must understand that I grant it: I was wrong.”

He still confronted her steadily. “If you'd granted that in the first place, you would have saved us all that misery and that humiliation.” He paused again, and then she felt the flare of his intolerance. “But that's it—I've learned that much; you're incapable of such recognitions.”

“Let us grant it,” she returned coldly. “From your point of view it is true. I am, as you say, incapable of them.”

Her voice had broken on the last words; and it seemed to her to be in response to its tremor that she could feel Cushing's attitude change. She raised her eyes to his. His face, in spite of its careful repression, seemed to her suddenly alive with an insistent question. In the few words he had spoken he had been as far as possible from the plea of feeling. Yet now he pressed her with it as actually as with a touch. She might have

foreseen, she thought, that he would put his appeal before her like this, with no slightest break in his own reticence and no sacrifice of his tacit blame of her behaviour, but with his inarticulateness itself alive with his hope. There was in him now the apparent quality of a suffering which had penetrated to the inmost places of sentiment. It reminded her what he himself must have paid for the failure of his idealisation of her, and her pity merged confusedly into the stir of her agitation.

She broke out hurriedly, with the odd sense that she answered the question his silence had put to her.

"But how can I come back to you? How is it possible"—she spread out her hands—"that I should do so without——"

"Without caring for me?" He had caught her up in a flash, and though he stopped there she was more vividly aware than before of all his silence implied.

"Ah, don't you see that that is my difficulty—that I feel all the feeling between us?"

The room seemed, to her strained sense, to give back to her again all the long echoes her question stirred; to call up all the beauties of their relation—the responses she had given to Cushing and the responses she had inspired in him. He had moved forward and rested his hand on the desk beside hers. She was conscious of a quick wish that he should not touch her; and at the same time of a faint surprise that he should not cast aside his consideration and understand the strength which the gesture would give his appeal.

"You can't really think that! You can't really believe it's impossible for us both to concede and con-

form; and what on earth do concessions matter," he protested, "when you still care for me?"

"But that is just it. That is the reason"—she shook her head—"I cannot understand it, but I so intensely believe it! No, Paul, we have cared for each other—you and I—ah, but we have cared uniquely! But you, too, you must see that that is just the reason I despair. If we had our love alone to deal with——!" Her smile showed for a second through her tears. "But we have also marriage; we are married; that fact, if we live together, we must accept. Some love means a wider form of feeling; ours—well, it has been wonderful, but it has been special. One does not apply a thing as delicate and beautiful as that to the test of our profound unlikeness, of the antagonism which—*tenez*, but in another hour!—would arise between us. No"—she made a wide gesture—"you will never know what it has cost me to feel—to see—how I could stir you, and yet to know that in my feeling itself there was a quality which would offend you and which would make me feel your offences to me!"

Cushing's next words were accompanied by a repetition of his slight colour. "I believe," she heard him saying, "that you were made to feel everything!"

The mist in her eyes warmed and thickened. "Ah, if you knew how I detest such a failure—such a degradation! But we are the same people we were when I left you. I should be coming back to you because of my feeling alone, and not because of what I believe to be possible. In marriage one's greatest necessity is consistency; and our consistencies, poor things——! But we should see the very reasons of my return differently.

No, we are two people between whom there can exist no compromise. There it is: I admit I am forever seeing *nuances* in what you accept as simplicities, or simplicities in your *nuances* which I cannot even express to you!" In the silent attention with which he followed her she seemed to see, with a sudden dread, the accomplishment of her own end and the acquiescence which his sense of consideration would give her. At the meeting of the two thoughts—her plea and the sadness of its successful issue—the wave of her emotion broke over her. "Ah, if you had asked me to come back before I had time to see it straight!"

He corrected her gravely. "I'd never have asked you—I didn't ask you. It's for you to come."

"Then—but then I should have come. Yes, and gone again. Or worse, I should have stayed; and what happiness we had would have cost us a revival of all that has been debased between us. That is it. One cannot so debase things——" Her finest smile, like the visible compound of both her scepticism and her resignation, lit her face. "If only I were like Mrs. Herring!"

"You mean that Geraldine——"

"Oh, I mean more than that she would not see, that she would not be aware. It would be so simple for her! She has not my sense of expediency—not, if you put it so, my knowledge of life. She would sacrifice everything for the feeling of the moment, forgetting that in marriage it is the years and not the moments which must be lived. But how strange it all is! Her advantage of me is deeper than that." Her face quivered. "She—she is satisfied to live with her ideal of you—to get, in her fantastic way, the emotion of her

memories; and I—I shall continue to suffer, to detest it." She paused and drew a quick breath. "Oh, but if I could do it!"

Cushing did not move for a moment; when he did so he merely bent nearer her and said, in a low tone: "I'll risk everything—I'll accept everything!"

"But how can I do it?" She took a hurried step away from him, with an actual sense of being swept off her feet into a turmoil where the mere sound of his voice would overcome her. Then, as she turned back, she felt the flame fall and die. "No, it is no use. We know too well what we have had to bear. How I wish I did not see it all so clearly! The same thing would happen again; it would be exactly the same, I assure you," she ended.

She saw that the look he had fixed on her fell, and a second later he had returned to his usual manner. "There's nothing more to say, then. When you've made up your mind what steps you want me to take, you'll let me know?"

She felt her tears rise uncontrollably and they clouded her voice. "You think me odious—you think me wrong!"

He had turned, with the obvious intention of opening the door for her, and he looked around with a brief surprise. "But don't you see that, in a certain way, that's just what I don't do? It was a risk, our marriage; and now that you grant that I've been at least decent, now that we've faced the possibility of trying it again—the thing we can't deny is that there was reason after reason besides your suspicion to part us. I didn't see it then; but your distrust of me, and my distrust of

your distrust, were perhaps what brought the whole thing to a head. I don't pretend now that you're not right. The only difference between us is that for a feeling such as we've had, I'd risk everything and you wouldn't."

She shook her head firmly. "No, I should not; I know, I suppose, too much——" She faltered. He had gone to the door and opened it, and as he turned his back to her something in the brace of his shoulders, so slight a betrayal that it was nothing, reminded her of what he must conceal. Her emotion gathered into a current which tossed her once more to the brink of a revulsion; but she felt herself sustained, in some curious manner, by the example of his determination, and a moment later she had passed out of the room.

BOOK II

XVI

AS the heavy doors closed, with a long reverberation which rose and faded to an echo against the stone vaultings, Anne-Marie raised her head and looked around her.

The effect of a silence briefly broken and gradually resumed reminded her of the constant silence which the wide room where she stood enclosed, and which seemed less the omission of sound than one of the attendant consecrations of beauty. At the end of the gallery to her left, at the convergence of two walls hung in velvet of so soft a tint that it seemed to have taken the colour of time itself, a tall Greek vase stood, pale against the background of the trees in the garden outside, and the sun struck and lit the nobility of its curves. To the right the first pictures began to show, spreading into a long line of varying colour; she caught sight of the warm, brilliant flesh of a Rubens and the purple of a Veronese drapery, which Irish had once told her was unequalled for texture and flow. Through the archway she faced she could see the deep greens and the froth-like whites in the first cases of jades; beyond them were the crystals, the porcelains, and beyond those the fantastic world of the Chinese paintings. Though she had always been acutely aware of the beauty of these things, they seemed to her to have received, in the passage of events, a connection with the most poignant personal meanings.

She had had the strange sense, particularly in the last hours, of the logic with which human character meets the illogical turns of life. Looking back over the past five months, first in their collective and larger significance and then with the gradual clarifying, in her memory, of the details of weeks and days, the events which had followed her break with Cushing seemed to have their own continuity. Her sense of a vast impersonal significance in what personally affected her—her consciousness of the ebb and flow of tendencies rather than of the over-importance of the individual—took the place with her of those habits of introspection which, in American women, had so frequently astonished her. It was not, after all, she said to herself as her eyes travelled slowly up and down the gallery, the accidents of life which counted; they existed merely on the surface, and they were usually too extraordinary or too subtle to be interesting. What must always count, in the long run, was the general truthfulness, to training and to taste, with which one met them.

The first thing which had broken into the habits of monotony which she had assumed in her rootless days at her hotel, and during the period of inertia which had succeeded her talk with Cushing, was the appearance in New York, for a few days only, of her cousin Madame von Alfons. She was on her way back to France, after an absence from home and a long trans-Pacific trip which, as she frankly said, the part of prudence had advised. Their talks had been long enough to place Anne-Marie once more in direct relation to her natural standards. Madame von Alfons had indeed been so surprised at the fact that Cushing and his wife had decided

on a legal separation that her only conclusion was that Anne-Marie must have lost her powers of judgment, through contact with the contagious and sentimentally inexact views of her adopted life. Even if her suspicions of her husband had had every foundation, she reminded Anne-Marie that such a difficulty was less tangible than the loss of her position and her home. Since she had absolved Cushing it was even more extraordinary that she should have balanced the privileges which went with him against all this confusion and uncertainty. Anne-Marie had evidently forgotten that one's business in life was not to assert one's self but to adapt one's self. Anne-Marie parted from her cousin with the sense that the hard light of a disintegrating clarity had been turned upon her actions—that all that was important was that the world was composed of two sexes, and that everything would have gone well between her husband and herself if only she had been wise enough to treat him with a more subtle indirection.

Anne-Marie herself had vaguely acquiesced in attributing her situation to the influences of a morality which was alien to her. The disagreeable sequences of her act—her constant fear of meeting Cushing and all the inevitable concessions required of her meticulous sense of form—had convinced her of its cost. But she was conscious, after Madame von Alfons went, that it was her belief in the importance of propriety and expediency which convinced her, rather than her feeling. She knew that her cousin's reproaches were just. But whether it were the result of her impact with Cushing's personality or not, she was for the first time aware of a knowledge

Mimi did not possess. It was a knowledge which had cost her everything and yet, as she at moments felt, which had yielded her the richer harvest of experience. Cushing's imaginative treatment of what Madame von Alfons saw as so plainly practical and his extension of the significances of human contacts were what made her least able to forget him. Evening after evening she shut her eyes and dropped her book to her lap, with a vision of him taking shape between her thoughts and her closed lids. She saw not only what he must at that hour be doing—perhaps at his club, perhaps in the darkened suspense of a theatre, with the light striking along the long tiers of faces and lingering on his, perhaps bent over his desk, his hand moving quickly and methodically over page after page and his eyes raised, every now and then, to set themselves on the fire. She saw too the wide and diverse forms his need of her must take. Two or three times she had started up and gone towards the telephone. So easy and immediate a means of summoning him made it an almost irresistible temptation to risk another talk with him—if, indeed, she risked nothing more. But the press of the recollection of her suffering and of its insidious and penetrating forms was still too close. She was deterred most of all by her remembrance of those times when her admission that she cared for him had been spoilt by his misunderstanding, and by her fear of misunderstanding in her turn.

It had been one January day, when she turned into a print shop where the work of a young Parisian etcher was on view, that she had come face to face with Arthur Irish. Her grave ease had dispelled the temporary embarrassment they both felt, and after a few moments'

hesitation they had gone in together and she had spent an hour listening to his quick, incisive comments on the prints. He had then walked home with her, and a few days later he had come in to tea and had brought with him a dry-point he had told her was specially good. She remembered this occasion of their meeting vividly—even more so than the numerous ones which were immediately to follow. Before he left Irish had stood for a moment, looking around him. She could see that, in his restlessly vague way, he was registering less the garishness of her sitting room than the way in which she had so successfully separated herself from it. The plants in the window, the set of Montaigne on the table, a deep golden-yellow colour and with the peculiar aroma of an old French library still hanging about the brownish pages, the vase of violets beside her chair and the neatness of the folded lace-work at her elbow, were all part of the fine shadings which went to make up her exquisiteness. She had for the first time understood, as she watched him, with her smile, that the more he penetrated her quality the more he would realise that it was as good, in its way, as the quality of his best *Elzévirs*.

Before he left he had turned to her and had abruptly asked if, whenever she felt like it, she would speak to him in French. He had always admired, he declared, her fidelity to English and her omission, except at rare moments, of the interpolated phrase. But it was in the freedom and glitter of her own language that he was sure he should best know her. It was French which supplied, with a person like her, the necessary elision between thought and thought and which expressed her inimitable compound of a shrug and a philosophy. When

he heard her speak in French, he said that he saw all France in her phrases. He saw the women who had produced her—the perfection with which they had paid the penalty of class for its privilege, the standard which valued an hour by the apt or witty word it brought forth. He was beginning to learn that her outward expressions corresponded to inner qualities; and even in inexact English he declared that what she said always seemed to contain, beyond its meaning, a latent life.

Although Madame von Alfons—perhaps in view of her own situation—had been careful how she stated it, Anne-Marie had been none the less acutely aware of both the plainest and the subtlest comment which ran in and out of all her cousin had said to her. No woman, in that lady's view, left her husband unless she had what Anne-Marie could imagine her calling the consolations of a reason. In some obscure way she had felt, in retrospect, a faintly derisive humiliation that Mimi should have had to reproach her with only a lapse of judgment, and not with one of those lapses of conduct the imprudence of which, in their mutual view, was sometimes richly repaid. She was conscious that the regulations of an American life had inevitably made her view men less personally. Irish was the first man she had known whose cosmopolitanism was not restricted to an annual few weeks in Paris or an annual visit to the Riviera or the Scotch moors; and if he had not her own principles of conduct, at least his lack of the usual American principles was definite.

At first, in the hours they more and more frequently spent together, she had had the sense of his contradictions and of his lack of the force of simplicity. It was these

qualities in him which explained to her the fact that he had cared for Mrs. Herring. Yet whenever she thought of the strange revelations her contact with Geraldine had brought her, she was less surprised at Irish's caring for her than at Cushing's. Irish's vague acceptance of women, without any particular questions concerning them, reminded her that at times even the best taste was betrayed into admiring the specious. She was still less impressed by Mrs. Herring's generosity than by the glitter of her personal charm. Reaction from that kind of charm, she had tartly thought, must be to something very good, and her keen perception was quick to follow the processes of Irish's readjustment. But she too was making her readjustments. She was depending on Irish's visits more and more and was constantly and definitely more interested in him; and as she watched his nascent feeling grow, the fact that she could return it had slowly cast a light into obscure corners of her consciousness. Her response was all the deeper because she felt its inevitable logic. This was after all what a woman must reasonably expect to happen to her; whenever the force of this conclusion had come to her, she had reverted, in her thoughts, to her last talk with her husband. To have affected him so visibly had restored her belief in her powers. She remembered each detail of the tribute which Cushing's glances had paid her, and the way his attention had lingered on the movements of her hands and the turn of her head. It had not needed Madame von Alfons to remind her what a miscalculation it would be on the part of fate if such a power were to remain useless. The restrictions of the rootless life she must lead, once her separation from Cushing had been made legal, had seemed to her

more and more intolerable. She saw herself living in some out-of-the-way corner of France, without the sympathy either of her own people or of the people whose life she had left France to share. Her lustre would dim early, since there would be no appreciative eyes to see it. It was not only herself whom she would immure, but the long line of women whose impulses had been transmitted to her. She knew that she was alive in the experiences of a race which had lived its lives fully; yet by her own mismanagement she would have to admit that she had limited herself to the existence of the woman who is marked a failure by the absence of the established signs of success. The afternoon before, when the barrier to which she and Irish had steadily drawn closer fell away and Irish had admitted the fact of his feeling and shown her her own in the colours of actuality, she had found herself recalling, with a sudden reversion of thought, Cushing's declaration of love to her. It was characteristic of him that he should have trusted to the look he had sent her, across a crowded room, to convey to her what he meant. Cushing had always wanted to see in their relation the beauty of the adventurous. It was the fundamental difference between his standpoint and hers, she had thought, with her eyes suffused for a second with recollection, that she was content to see in her love for Irish the beauty of the logical and the practical.

She was aroused by the sound of the opening of a door behind her—not one of the main doors, but a door giving access to some inner part of the building—and by a breath of the cool rare air against her face.

She rose hurriedly. She had not been prepared to see any one but Irish, and she was turning to move further down the gallery when she heard her name called.

"Mr. Irish begs, Mrs. Cushing, that you'll come to his private room. He'll join you there instantly."

"Ah! In that case, then——" She broke off, with her eyes passing quickly over the black and white distinction of the man who confronted her. Though his English had the perfection of ease, she noticed at once in it the slightest tinge of French.

"It has been unfortunate that Mr. Irish had to see a gentleman on business which unexpectedly prolonged itself. He hoped to be free long before you came. They're just saying a last word now, at the outer door; and if you'll be good enough to come this way——"

Anne-Marie hesitated and then bent her head. "You are Monsieur de Fresneuil then; Mr. Irish has spoken to me of you. You are French—as I am."

"Yes, madame; I am Mr. Irish's secretary."

He had bowed in his turn, and as he again raised his head Anne-Marie felt her attention arrested for a perceptible moment. His face had not changed, but its reserve seemed to her now only the mask of a quickly shifting intelligence. The inner recognitions of his look passed before her as rapidly but as vividly as a light passing through a darkened room. She was astonished to feel that the colour rose and trembled in her cheeks. It was not only that, in this brief instant, she felt for the first time the equivocation of her presence here, but that she was conscious of some sensitiveness, in her companion, to which her own sensitiveness instinctively responded. Fresneuil merely turned, however, after an-

other quick look at her, to the door by which he had entered. "Mr. Irish must be free now, madame, if you will come this way."

XVII

WHEN she had parted from him, the day before, Anne-Marie had already begun to understand how completely the past weeks had transfigured Irish for her. When she confronted him now, with the quiet intimacy of his inner room, whose long windows were open to the fresh spring air, drawing around them a circle of privacy, she felt her own subjugation to the change. His thin shoulders, his quizzical eyes and the blend of idleness and energy she had learned to couple with him had gradually assumed their special charm. Her intuition was keenly at work. She had long since recognised that the way to stimulate his own interest, in return, was gradually to let him see more and more of the inner qualities which composed her. She knew that the fortunate coincidences of nature and taste between them were obvious. But it was her instinct to go deeper, and already she found herself planning her responses and the ways in which she could elaborate their happiness.

Irish had begun by telling her how many hours he had spent here, trying vainly to explain to himself the spell which he felt more and more strongly upon him. "I used to come here as soon as I left you. No one ever sees this room—I keep it for myself. The countless times I've fancied you standing against that screen—do you see? And I used to imagine the way the velvets

and the cartoons would make your eyes widen and soften, the way they do when you're pleased. Yet I made up my mind not to bring you here until I knew that you too cared, until I had the chance to make you forget the unhappinesses you must have been through."

She faced him tremulously for a moment and then made a wide gesture. "There! I have forgotten! Ah, what life is! What a mystery—and what a struggle! *Je vous assure, mon ami, que la mienne n'a pas été bien gaie!*" She paused, arrested by the odd sense of the contrast between Irish's sympathy with her French and Cushing's intolerance of it.

"Do you think it's been easy to know that, when I felt the way I've felt?" Irish bent forward, from the low seat he had taken beside her, and held both her hands. "We'll go slowly—we must think. It's that which made me keep you waiting just now. I'd sent for my lawyer, and I put it just that way to him—how slowly we'd have to go and how thoroughly we'd have to think."

She drew back and straightened in her chair. "How slowly we go——! But I do not understand!" Her lightest gaiety tinged her smile. "Surely, my dear, after the place at which we have already arrived, it does not very much matter how we continue!"

"It matters this much—that I'll have nothing with Cushing but fair play. There'll have to be a divorce."

"Yes; it is of course inevitable that my husband must divorce me. He is scarcely a person to lend himself to concessions and arrangements. But he will conduct it with as much privacy as possible. You can be sure of that."

"I am sure of it. Griffiths will see him, or see whoever acts for him, and put it to him frankly."

The puzzled intensity of her look cleared. "No, but now I understand! You want me to marry you!"

"Of course," Irish answered; "we must marry." Anne-Marie noticed that as he spoke he had the faintest resemblance to her husband—enough to remind her, for a brief instant, that he too came of this race whose classifications of honour were so difficult because they were so vague.

She looked around her again, as if the reminder of what his tastes had trained him to would give her an assurance of his understanding. "Listen to me," she laid her hand lightly on his,—“it is better that we should make it clear. I shall never marry you. I do not want to marry you.”

Irish flushed, and again she heard in his tone something like Cushing's. "You're young, you know. I can't be enough of a cad to let you make an irrevocable mistake. No, no; we must have some regard for consequences. They're what are important, if one's half decent. I know that you've no one very near you to consult and I, since my mother's death, have no one either. But there are consequences, none the less, and specially important ones where a person like you is concerned."

She watched him for another moment. "But you yourself—you do not want to marry."

"I want to do what's fair; and since with any one of your sort, that's the only possible thing that's fair——"

"Certain conventionalities are infinitely important, of course;" she nodded gravely. "It all depends on what one

gains by sacrificing them. To a certain extent I have sacrificed them already. I made an unfortunate marriage; since I have escaped from it—*passe!* We need not speak of it again. Now I have you and all that you offer me; the question is," she gave him a swift smile, "do not let us say anything so sad as how I am to keep it, but rather how I am most successfully to accept it."

"That's all very well." He answered with a touch of impatience. "But go over to that mirror and look at yourself; and then think of the disasters—the cheap disasters—such irregularities include. You'll scarcely blame me, then, for fearing them for you and for insisting that before we face a scandal, we face the consequences. Ah, Anne-Marie, you're the rarest of the rare, you're a princess; and yet you expect me to put you in a position like that! Life's not romantic that way, nowadays." His eyes returned her smile, from behind his habitual glasses. "It's merely sordid."

She answered instantly. "Life, my dear, depends on the person who lives it." She gave another long look around the room and at its evident betrayals of Irish's inner needs—the rarity of its beauty, the careful arrangements for his comfort, the air of completeness which reached an almost unnatural perfection. Then, with her face set in an expression of decision, she turned back to him. "I know. I can do it."

"You can carry it off? Of that there's little doubt, so far as I'm concerned! The question is whether you can carry it off with other people."

She waited again, as if to convince him how thoroughly she weighed her reply. "Yes. I can carry it off with you so well that you won't mind that I don't carry it off

with other people. Other people! Ah, what they cost one!"

"Do you mean in their enmity—in their antipathy?"

"I mean in one's vast sense of the importance of their good opinion." She sighed. "I value it exceedingly; but I must let it go; and because, as I tell you, I have more to gain by losing it. And when I have the world to gain——!" She gave him for a moment the light softness of her glance. "My poor friend, you must not lose your head. Or rather it is I who must keep it for you. I know very well how it is. You do not want to marry, and of all mistakes you could make the greatest would be to marry me. It is not your *genre*, it is not you. You do not want a family; ah, it is a little disappointing of you, but you do not. You want to spend your life in the pursuit of your tastes. You have said so to me before now—yes, you remember? The convention of marriage is unsuited to you; and I, in this instance, should be the one to pay the penalty of its being unsuitable. One cannot so lightly disregard a man's character. That—that is regard for consequences, if you like!"

Irish watched her in silence. Underneath the quick curiosity of his face and the even touch with which his hand continued to stroke hers, she seemed to see him turn over the idea. She knew he had the unexpected and surprising conventionalities of a man whose defiance of opinion is acquired rather than natural and whose very originalities are hampered by a touch of shyness. He was evidently making the mental admission that he dealt, after all, with a person in whom it was a traditional habit to manage such situations with the highest hand. Once he

had granted the necessity of yielding to her, she knew too that all his training would show him what the felicity of their future must be. "Well, after all," he broke out—"oh, I'm arguing against myself, I know, but as if consequences matter!"

She smiled. "But they matter exceedingly! Only your kind of consequences are not as wise as mine. I see the obvious difficulties—the fact, for instance, that if we do or do not marry our friends will be equally scandalised. It is more important, I think, that we should make it all a success. No," she grew grave, "what would our marriage be? A marriage of love, but not a marriage of reason. We have between us none of the qualities to make it a success. I, you see—I know."

"What do you mean? You mean that your own experience has taught you——?"

"Exactly. My own experience has taught me." The fine muscles of her face quivered slightly. "But if you want me to share as much of your life as I can share—if you will give me, and let me give you, all the happiness we can exchange"—it seemed to Irish that she put into it the perfect mixture of pride and generosity—"that, I will consent to."

"But we can't openly admit, my dear, that we're defying all rules!"

Her shoulders rose. "It will matter very little what we admit. All we can be sure of is that we shall not be in a position to deny. Ah, I can foresee it. If I live in a house in which you more or less live, if your money pays for what I have—we may get a few people to think we are conventionally acceptable, but they will be very few. My point is, *voyez vous*, that it really does

not matter whether I am conventionally acceptable or not."

"You think——"

She put an end to his uncertainty with her gesture of definite decision. "I think I can judge myself by a standard which is more relentless than most people's standards. And that will show me that I am disgraced."

"Yet you'll do it?"

"Yet I shall do it. Because I prefer to do it. I have learned." Her wit lit her eyes for a second. "I cannot understand you American men, and it seems to me that I may make fewer mistakes if I do it this way."

XVIII

CUSHING scarcely knew how often, in the past months, his most sensitive memories had stirred. In the first weeks after his parting with his wife had been made definite he had been conscious of an increasing stricture in his ideas and in his habits—the inevitable penalty, he supposed, of his resolve to maintain an attitude in which there was no tinge of emotionalism. His loss had been too vital for him not to have made vital readjustments. Little by little he had accepted the inevitable necessities of his situation. He had absorbed himself in his work and later, as his hold grew firmer, he had re-established the same kind of life he had led before his marriage. He could see that his acceptance surprised the people he saw, and particularly his sister, more than any refusal could possibly have surprised them. They did not know, he reflected, that to uproot

the inmost growths of one's sentiment and one's pride left no choice but that of the same fundamental reconstruction one made after a death.

Yet the fact that Anne-Marie was still so integral a part of the fibre which wove his days was suddenly clear to him when, one afternoon towards the end of May, he found on his hall table a letter addressed to him in her hand. Like most men of his type of training, he had his moments of entire and unreasoning capitulation to feeling; and after he had carried the letter upstairs and shut himself in his room with it, he seemed to see extended before him again the greatest perspectives. Even when he had been conscious only of the pain of what had passed between him and his wife, the pressure of her influence had been constant and discernible. Now it flared up with the accumulated vitality of a force which has gathered during a long period of inaction.

He sat turning the envelope over and over, smiling at his thought that it was an inevitable quality of any message from her that it suggested something pressing and secret. Her touch upon the paper infused it with some of her charm and in the few strokes of her pen there was an indication of her particularity. It might be his own fatuity that made him yield to the spell. But he found himself admitting that, with none of the impulsiveness of youth to help him, he had after all forgotten many of the difficulties of living with her—that, however unreliable she had at times proved herself, in their last talk she had shown not only the clearest precision of judgment but also a vital feeling. His smile deepened. He could not deny the touch of incompetence in the flourishes of her ornate writing. His humour had

to grant that what affected him so was the fact that her thin, quick hands had rested on the paper rather than anything the letter might say to him.

"Dear Paul," her note ran, "I need to see you. I should not do so unless it were pressing and necessary; believe me, this is now the case. Will you come to-morrow to meet me in the park? There is a bench to the right of the end of the long alley of trees. I shall be there between half past five and six. Anne-Marie."

He knew that if the letter had been written by any one else, so reasonable and practical a request would have had nothing more than its face value. But it was his wife's special quality that, intermixed with her sense of the reasonable and practical, there was the stirring touch of drama. The next afternoon, as he walked down the alley to the place she had named, and though he felt faintly sarcastic at the idea that he should have remained so sensitive, his expectation was so keen that his blood quickened in its flow. It had been a clear radiant day, merging now into a dusk so full of light and with such a kindled sky that there was scarcely twilight and some of the brilliancy of the afternoon met the first lamps of the evening. The alley was empty, and almost at once he made out Anne-Marie on the seat she had named. One of her arms was on the back of the bench and her chin rested on her hand; and as he drew nearer he could presently see that her eyes were fixed on the western sky and on the glow which hung back of the irregular mass of distant buildings.

The sight of her seemed to cancel the months since they had parted and his inevitable sense of her strangeness. She had been specially insistent that the arrange-

ments of their separation should pass through his lawyer. He remembered the hurried line she had sent him, one day when he had asked her to talk with him about the question of her income, scrawled on the back of a legal paper. "Do not ask me to see you about such a thing. We have been both too happy and too sad together to meet because of the details of such a traffic." His recollection of her, therefore, had remained the poignant one of what had passed between them when she came to him to acknowledge her error; and when he was almost beside her and saw her rouse herself from whatever vigil her thoughts were keeping, what instantly struck him was the difference between her bearing now and her bearing the last time they had met. From the Anne-Marie who had been grave and resigned, with her attention set so persistently on large questions, to the person who now raised her eyes speechlessly to his, there was a surprising change.

For the first time he wondered keenly what she had been doing and feeling. It had seemed part of the consideration he owed her that he should have tried, since their separation, to refrain from thinking of her with any of the pettinesses of jealousy and recrimination. He had schooled himself to separate his love from their failure, to realise that however plainly impossible a continuance of their tie had been he would always feel for her a tenderness of sentiment he could feel for no one else. Now all the various issues with which, in the interval, she herself might have been occupied, rose vividly before him. It was typical of her, he thought, that he should receive this impression because of the way in which she looked. Her subtlety of appearance had never

been more striking and her beauty more disturbing. She wore a dress which was soft and dark and a hat covered with a mass of green feathers; and around the top of her throat, half hidden by her boa, he caught the gleam of a band of diamonds. The jewels were strange to him. But they seemed merely a part of her bewildering way of so composing her appearance that she conveyed her state of mind by what she had on, and Cushing was conscious of a quick amusement at the aspect of intrigue which her looks lent to their meeting.

"Ah, Paul, how good of you to come!" She moved along the bench to make room for him. "You understood—I particularly wanted to see you." Her glance again met his. "You were surprised?"

"I'm scarcely surprised at anything you do;" Cushing heard that his tone was sardonic, but his eyes kept steadily playing over the renewed freshness of her beauty. "Oh, I'll admit it to you! Whenever I see you, and for whatever reason, it's a pleasure to me to do even that—merely to see you."

She drew a quick breath and hesitated, irresolutely. "But I should not have seen you—I should not have put either you or myself through the difficulties of our meeting, unless I had had a definite reason for doing so. You speak of the pleasure of seeing me; there are some pleasures one is unwise to permit one's self. You know how I feel about the indecencies and the decencies of such a situation. Ah," she threw back her head, and as her throat turned he saw the size of the diamonds around it, "and you have been so good—so quick to consider my feelings!"

"Then it isn't that I've unexpectedly failed?" he asked

gravely. He had turned, on the bench, to watch her profile. "My lawyer had my instructions to try in every way to satisfy you—to fall in, as well as he could, with those ideas of yours which—you'll forgive me?—are from a lawyer's point of view sometimes indefinite. No," he held up his hand to arrest her, "don't forget that it was I who was wrong. I had no business to let you in for so much unhappiness. I've lost the sense of many things, in the last months, but I've not lost the sense of that."

"You have suffered," she said, in a low tone, and more to herself than to him. "I saw it when last we met—I see it now." She paused and then broke out irrelevantly: "But that is what is so marvellous! Whatever you do, whatever you feel——" she outlined him with a wave of her hand—"you keep yourself intact. *Allons*, I have always said it; you have a real personality. Yes! And now concerning what I have to say." She waited for a second more, with her eyes on the grey-gloved hand which held his stick. Then, with that motion of her shoulders which stood for resignation, she continued: "*Tenez!* You will perhaps remember a talk we had at the time of our marriage, when we discussed the future. Yes? But what a life-time ago it seems! I said to you then that I believed the first duty, between a man and a woman, was consideration. You remember? And I do not feel, you must understand, that the consideration I owe you has altogether ceased now that we are legally separated."

"Well?" Cushing asked; he was aware of his odd inability to consider, in what she had said, anything beyond the sudden suspicion which her pliant flattery had aroused in him.

She hurried on. "Ah, if you knew how profoundly I have felt for you—how profoundly I have been influenced, in my desire to be considerate, by your beautiful consideration of me! Come, I must say it. When I left you there was nothing—but absolutely less than nothing—in my own situation which I did not admit to you. I asked you to consent to our separation because I was convinced it was best—because of nothing more. Now," her hands appealed to him, "now, very recently, things have changed for me."

"Changed? I don't see; how have they changed? Do you mean——" he broke his question in two.

"I mean that the circumstances of my life have changed. I mean that I have entered into a new relationship. Since I left you on a different basis—and since you have been so extraordinarily kind—I felt it right that I should tell you. On Saturday I am leaving America, and I am leaving it," she spoke clearly, "with Mr. Irish."

A moment's silence followed her words, and then Cushing heard himself say: "So that's it! Is it possible!"

"You are surprised?" she asked. "Ah, but of course you are surprised!"

He turned away and looked at the trees which edged the walk, conscious that the rush of his thoughts needed some pause. He was as yet aware only of the determination that no inch of him should betray what he felt. At length he spoke.

"Well, things do surprise one when they come like this. Yet the only thing really surprising, I suppose, is the fact that I shouldn't definitely have foreseen it." He waited again. "You didn't lie to me, before? This

hasn't gone on from the time you left me? It wasn't your reason for refusing to come back to me? I remember, then, that at the back of my head there was something I couldn't explain and which I thought only a part of what's always inexplicable in you. Was it that? Was it Irish?"

She held up her head, with her familiar motion. "If it had been, I assure you that you should have known. Believe me or not, as you prefer, but I am incapable of cheap evasions."

"And you think that you've given me cause to accept your assurances——" Cushing paused. He was vaguely aware of a desire not to have the words of their interview on a par with its facts and that he must avoid, as far as possible, the baseness of recrimination. But with the passage of each moment his jealousy was becoming more intimate and the various elements of his resentment—the negation of the past, the memory of Anne-Marie's accusation of him and of her accusation of Geraldine Herring to Irish himself—less under his control. "Can't you understand that you've no longer the right to ask me to believe you?"

The coldness of her manner changed suddenly to eagerness and she bent towards him. "Ah, but if I could ever make it clear to you! In these months I have felt all that I was killing—all that not I, but the position I filled, represented for you. I have remembered all you wanted your wife to be; things I once thought impossible, but which now seem to me only an elaboration of your pain."

"It seems to me scarcely permissible that you should discuss my pain;" Cushing considered for a second; "and as to what I wanted my wife to be, you'll remember just

this: you're no longer my affair, but you've still my name, and until we're divorced you'll outwardly at least respect the position you once held. I won't have any open scandal."

Her eagerness lapsed. "I have never wanted to disregard what I owe you—never. That is why I am here to-day; ah," she held herself, "but if I had not come it would have been so hideously dishonest!"

Cushing was aware that he smiled, as if, in spite of the various impulses with which he was struggling, he recognised the tone she took. "I might have known, I suppose, that your idea of honesty begins and ends there. Let's be frank about it. You've behaved abominably—you and Irish too. You've taken advantage of the freedom my consideration gave you. If you're capable of that, you're capable of anything. I think there's nothing more to say. You'll hear from my lawyer and Irish will hear from him, and what has to pass between us can pass that way. Only you'll recollect: until our divorce is settled, you'll behave with some decency and some restraint." He rose, conscious that his longing to end the matter had reached a point beyond control.

As he stood in front of her, the look she gave him from under her drooped lashes suffused and deepened and she raised her handkerchief to her eyes. The gesture had a touch of her usual theatrics. Such a situation had its excitement for every woman, he supposed. Yet it affected him, and he paused.

She caught the break in his obdurate front instantly, and her lip quivered in response. "Ah, I regret it all so!" she exclaimed, in a low tone; "when I think of all that has existed between us——" She touched her breast,

with a quick tragic gesture. "Does it mean nothing to you that I too have suffered?"

"Does it mean nothing to you—I can only repeat it—that you've reached a point," his irony lit his face again, "where you're rather beyond the need of my sympathy?"

She let this pass in silence and, turning again, she fixed her eyes on the sky. "What it has been—to see one thing die and another born! Ah, what a wear and tear of experience! To feel myself bound to you by so much, and yet by so hopelessly little; to make my choice, and yet to feel its happiness was built on things which were scarcely cold, scarcely dead; things which still, in the strangest way, could tremble with life——"

She broke off. Cushing was scarcely aware of the intensity with which his eyes followed the visible passage, across her face, of what she said. The fluency of her disclosure of herself seemed to have summoned before him his knowledge of her infinite intricacy—the intricacy of her glances, her gestures, her powers—and yet of the direct simplicity of her feeling.

His pain suddenly found its way into words. "The only thing to do is never to think of it; it's beyond thought."

"Yes, it is beyond thought," she returned in a low tone; then with a quick lift of her eyes she added: "I have perhaps no right to tell you my plans—no more right than I have to ask you yours. If you knew how I have wondered what you would do; whether or not you would marry, since people here do remarry, whether or not you and Mrs. Herring——"

"I and Mrs. Herring! And you think it's so easy to

reconstruct that one can plan ahead and foresee even one's feelings?"

"No, I know that with you it is not easy—no easier than it would be with me; but undeniably she has her own personal touch, that woman——" she hesitated. "Well! I, at least, should like to tell you what I intend not to do. I shall not marry Mr. Irish."

In spite of his consciousness that it might be another of her dishonesties, it was instinctive with Cushing to respond with a quick rise of his blood. "If Irish has behaved badly to you——"

She took him up instantly. "He wants, you understand, to marry me. Left to his own judgment he wishes and prefers it. It is I who refuse."

"And it's part of your extremely kind consideration of me that you're to go off with him and not to marry him?" broke from him.

She met the question by holding her head higher still, but her dignity now had an inimitable sadness. "You will see that you are wrong, if you consider for a moment. Mr. Irish and I go away, to Europe, and I never reappear. I change my name, I observe every precaution. You divorce me—you name Mr. Irish. Very well. You are in the right; he—ah, he will somehow be in the right too. Men's reputations survive these things. I assure you that the scandal is my affair."

Cushing was aware that the strangest thing in the conflict of his feelings was his belief in what she had just said. She had lied in her actions, and yet the fact remained that so far as she herself went he could count on her to recognise the truth. He had never felt more keenly her complete lack of any self-deception, her

recognition of cost as cost, and for a moment it made even her dishonesty valuable.

He considered what he should say, and as he put his next question he was conscious that he did so with trust in the sincerity of her answer. "And why do you choose to do it in this way?"

She responded instantly. "That is a matter which I alone had to judge. I determined it according to character and to circumstance—the way one determines those things. I do not deny it: I understand that I sink, I leave my class and my position as a woman of honour. I may disguise it from other people, but I cannot disguise it from myself. As you say, I am done for." She ended with a gesture which closed the question. "I prefer to be done for."

"And you're happy?" The words escaped Cushing before he knew it.

"Ah, yes—very happy," she said, and her face softened, as if the shadow of a secret feeling had passed over it.

He felt again a dim sense of gratitude for her frankness. She did not attempt to deny what would so soon repossess and absorb her. As his eyes passed in quick succession over points in her loveliness which he so intimately knew, he understood that the fact that she had been so dishonest and yet so frank was the cause of his deepest grief. She had lost to him not herself but parts of herself, and she left him with the pain of a devotion only half betrayed and satirised. His defensive instinct was still alive, and between him and the cool shadowy masses of the trees around them there seemed to rise all the dangers which awaited a creature so highly and finely susceptible. If he could either wholly condemn

her or keep the integrity of her image as a lost vision—that, he thought, would have left him something to live on; whereas now he must couple her deception with her truth—he must understand that she had been dignified, in spite of the indignity of the diamonds around her throat. He gave her a final look and then, without further words, he turned away.

XIX

IT had been arranged that Irish and Anne-Marie should go at once to England. The scandal which would obviously follow them would make any stay in France, where they must meet Anne-Marie's relatives, too difficult for the present, and Irish had a house in London waiting to receive them. It was in these hurried days of planning that Anne-Marie showed him that in spite of her youth and of a certain proud innocence she had the technique of the situation to incredible perfection. Irish was at a point of enthusiasm which ignored comment; yet she did not give him a sense of a lesser enthusiasm in her insistence that it would be absurd not to respect and consider it. Her shrewd recognition of what confronted them seemed to have made their relation more serious, by computing carefully the elements which composed it; and at the same time he was made aware that, if she knew how to make these points, she also knew how completely to yield them.

It was she who said that they must not travel on the same ship. She had decided to call herself Madame du Chastel, which would somewhat conceal her identity;

but it was undeniable that he could not conceal his. Cushing was taking immediate steps to divorce her and he had declared his intention of introducing Irish's name into his suit. She insisted that Irish must remember that though these things did not now matter for her—since her position had become so frankly a negative one—they continued to matter for him. A man could defy the world, as she put it, but he could not disregard it. But when he had protested too vigorously against a separation of even a week, she had given way; and Irish himself was aware that she had contrived that both her objection and her surrender to his objection should transform the trivial incident into a stimulant of their feeling.

Their last days in New York were necessarily difficult. There was the question of a lawyer for Irish and of another for her, and the details of how she was to respond to Cushing's action had to be considered. Yet the fact that she considered them so little astonished Irish. She would never be guilty, she said, of the bad taste of benefitting by her legal freedom in order to marry again; and it was futile for her to insist on this point and that when she realised, so far more plainly than he and the lawyers, all that she was outraging. Irish began to understand that her audacities of conduct were the real ones. Once she had acceded to her own dishonour, and always with the sharpest sense of what it involved, she did so with what he could only describe—with an inward smile—as an elegant fatalism. She declared that it was part of her response to him that she should throw her good name to the winds and abandon the last fictitious appearance of decency. But none the less he was con-

stantly aware of the hard play of intellect in her, and he was learning more and more that this combination of her intelligence with her loveliness was the most powerful of her appeals.

It was an added proof of her manipulation that, in spite of the height of happiness to which she carried him, she should also admit her practical sense. Irish discovered that the effect of their feeling upon her was distinctly different from its effect upon him. Where he insisted that, in the sentimental aspect of their case, they had been destined for each other, she lightly asserted that all they need trouble about was the fortunate conjunction between her and his needs. She smiled at his claim that he must always have loved her. But she did not disregard the fact that he had always thought her extraordinary, and she admitted that for him the extraordinary, in a rare type, was something to be ultimately procured. For that matter, she intended to disregard nothing. It was part of her elision between the imaginative and the practical to disregard nothing. The combination of so much fineness with so much frankness seemed to Irish to bring them closer and yet to remove all the vulgarities of their propinquity. He saw that for the first time such a relation would have an effect on his character. He had never been used to the application of an intellectual process to such subjects, and he found that Anne-Marie could not only make her own clear conclusions, but that in her wonderful and yet simple way she arranged his next conclusion for him. This constant sense of her understanding in him something a little ahead of what he understood in himself, and

his own contentment with the result, had proved to him that she never misplaced her quick touches.

On their last afternoon at sea she had been lying back in her chair, listening to Irish's instructions to his secretary and thinking, as she listened, that the intricacies of her problem were gaining precision and continuity very much as the dim coast, as they approached, formed gradually into definite lines and masses.

In the midst of their agitated days in New York she had paused at the outer aspects of this problem only long enough to be conscious of her gratitude that Irish was singularly independent and that there were so few difficult adjustments to make between her and his already established relationships. His secretary was the only member of his household, and it was plain that his impeccable formality would protect her no less than his Gallic sense of both the distance and the dignity of his own subordinate position. It had been in the necessarily closer intimacy of the days on shipboard that she had first begun to suspect the peculiar qualities of his influence with Irish.

In the first days of her knowledge of Claude de Fresneuil she had wondered if the acquisition of a person so perfectly suited for the part he enacted was not the highest expression of Irish's facility for the gratification of every whim. It was obvious that their regard had originally been founded on Irish's difficulty in securing, even at a fantastic salary, the services of a person who had dealt so freely in the best that he had his own independence. Irish had sketched to her the history of the loss of Fresneuil's fortune and of his consequently turning to an occupation for which his traditions of distinction and

eclecticism had so happily fitted him. Fresneuil, as he put it to her, was all *flair*, all his amazing nose; he had the sharpest sense of form and texture, the surest divination of the difference between a repetition and a creation. The collections were founded on him, and it had been Fresneuil, Irish said, from whom he himself had learned something far rarer than any mere correctness of acceptance or refusal.

Fresneuil himself had treated her from the first with a consideration so evidently impervious that Anne-Marie was assured of his sense of her own difference and distinction. But she was also aware that such keenness could not stop suddenly short at the personal, and that a man who had so learned to discover and test quality must have for human nature his premises and conclusions. His presence was a constant reminder of the fact that he had not only his private knowledge and his private opinions, but of that part of Irish's life for which Fresneuil himself so palpably stood. As she leaned back, with her eyes on the rise and fall of the grey sea, and listened to the two men talk, the practical importance of the influences of Irish's tastes had never struck her more forcibly. Her quick wit divined that even a discussion of what he had secured and what he was hoping to secure gave him satisfaction. He was constantly interchanging objects of his collection between his London house and his New York library, and arranging for their transportation between exhibitions; and though he turned to her every now and then, with a quick smile, she caught in his face the reflection of a pleasure definitely separated from her.

"And I?" she asked, with a glance of light uncertainty,

as Fresneuil left them and Irish sank back in his chair; "I also go to the Stratton street house?"

"You mean that you're to be placed—to be put in a case or in a frame? And that's," he smiled, "what you think we've come away for—run away for?"

She held persistently to her point.

"No, I understand it. I am merely another form of your feeling for the best; but, my dear, I am proud to be! You do not run the risk of most of those people *là-bas*—of imaginative people whose imaginations have not yet been sufficiently educated. You really know. No, it is not you who are at my feet; it is I who am at yours. *Voyons*, could I expect it to be otherwise when you are more than known—you are famous? But it would be absurd—it would be losing half the pleasure your character gives me—if I ceased to remember that my charm for you is very much the same as the charm of a picture or a good series of tapestries!" She glanced at Fresneuil, who stood leaning on the rail a few yards away, and then gave Irish one of her intimate looks. "But do not forget that I am always jealous."

He held her eyes with his. "Of the pictures and the tapestries?"

"Of all the you I shall never know," she responded gravely; "of the things in you I cannot understand. But how foolish I should be to deny it! You are rare. I want you to see that I admire your rarity even if I cannot understand it. Your treasures—ah, of course I must yield part of you to them. But you must not forget it: I am always jealous."

"So long as it's a jealousy so theoretical and inanimate——!"

She broke his sentence by turning sharply in her chair and facing him. "Theoretical and inanimate! You—you need be jealous, where I am concerned, of only one relation, and that is a past one. What is more, it is a relation you can discount because you know the unhappiness it brought me. With me it is different. I am jealous of every one of your enthusiasms—the enthusiasms a taste like yours can make so concrete; I am jealous of everything for which you have ever cared." She smiled quickly. "It is a strange combination of effects, but when you have cared you have been both the one who was indifferent and the one who was enriched. Each time you have gained something deep and you have sharpened your taste; is it not enough to make any woman jealous?"

Irish, underneath the cover of her rug, had caught and held her hand. He hesitated for a moment. He had already been aware of the contrast between his natural indifference and the state of effusion she could create and maintain in him—an effusion which had its own paradoxical touch in that it took shape again and again in the insistence of his desire to marry her. "There's only one way out of it! I can't help it—one can't couple you with these things, these evasions, with the way"—he looked around—"with the way we have to watch lest people are watching us. There's something more. I can't run the risks for you; the risk that the jealousy you speak of now as fantastic should ever touch either you or me. It's too risky to keep up: you'll have to marry me!"

"Ah, in what a violent and delightful way you put it!" Her smile was full of amusement but her eyes remained grave. "I cannot marry you—no. But I need the con-

solation of having you want me to. I never cease to remember that my charm for you is not as fixed as the charm of the good series of tapestries or the pictures. I see all the risks; and yet I have—how do you say it?—I have burned my ships.”

“You’re never sorry?” he asked impulsively. “If you’re sorry, don’t you see that it’s the proof that there’s something better than this for me to do for you——”

She shook her head. He had noticed that the tone of her positiveness could vary, according to his own mood, but not its substance. However she expressed her refusals, he was always reminded that they had their dignity as well as acceptances. “You are charming to me; you always put it that you want only my permission to do everything in the world for me.” She paused. “But that is a weakness of my situation; I admit it. I no longer give you my permission—you have it. There have happened between us things which make me unable to do otherwise than grant you permission.” Her smile deepened, and she laid her hand on the sable rug across her knees. “And I have my consolations. Not only you, my dear, but what you give me is always there to console me.”

Both her instinct and her good sense had prompted her to maintain so high an attitude and to determine that all her feeling should never betray her into the smallest lapse. But a decisive incident occurred on the following day to warn her further of her difficulties.

Irish’s English cousins, who were among his only near relatives, had learned of his coming and had motored to Liverpool to meet him. It was Fresneuil who found them on the pier, and he came back to the ship,

where Irish still waited with Anne-Marie, with the warning and the news that they expected Irish to drive up to town with them. Irish's impatience at once broke out, and he declared that any admission of Anne-Marie's presence and of their situation would be better than the stupid necessity of leaving her. Anne-Marie herself had yielded at once to the obvious demands of prudence and had assured him that it would be quite easy for her to go to an hotel for the night and travel up to London the next morning. She noticed that Fresneuil's efforts to convince him supported her own. He merely put before Irish the probable results of any fantastic action. She felt that he had long since learned that this was the only form of dissuasion possible, with a person so determined to have his own way.

Anne-Marie lingered for a few moments on the pier, amongst the confusion of the luggage, until Fresneuil, who had gone to see Irish off, rejoined her.

"Now, madame—I've a motor cab for you and they tell me you'll be exceedingly comfortable at the hotel. Yes, Mr. Irish got off easily. They're to spend the night halfway up to town and he'll meet you at Euston on the arrival of the first fast train. I regret so much that I had to keep you waiting—that you've had this delay——"

She had never felt surer of herself or of her ability to carry off the fact that, for the first time, she and Fresneuil must admit in words the fact of her situation. Yet she was conscious that the high angle at which she kept her head and the courtesy of her quick thanks could not disguise her inner perturbation. Fresneuil's very consideration had stirred in her a sudden distaste for her position—for her inability to accompany Irish, anywhere

and openly, for the caution which required her to wait, among the press of the crowd and the porters who came and went between the piles of trunks, until she could leave the pier unseen.

Fresneuil had taken up her dressing bag, and stood waiting for her and her maid to follow him. She caught for a moment in his eyes the same thought which was penetrating her and his wonder as to how she was to become indurated to the necessities of such evasions, though they had both easily continued to talk and to comment lightly on the English climate and the dampness of the docks.

XX

IRISH drew a little back, out of the press of people in the long rooms, whose groups were constantly breaking and reforming; and as he watched Anne-Marie, across the intervening crowds, he felt as if he had never, in the last few months, had so clear a view of her.

It was the first time that he had seen her amongst other people—people, that is, who knew him and who recognised that she had a position, or a lack of position, which they must either accept or ignore. She disliked being seen in public with him; and he was vaguely aware that only the slight indications of his restlessness had made her consent to accompany him, on this February afternoon, to a private view of some modern Dutch paintings. Everything had conspired to bore him a little. Fresneuil could always divert him—Anne-Marie had even begun to suspect that sometimes he was astute enough to make the conditions of the search for treasures run less

smoothly, to that end—but he had gone to Paris for a few days. Irish had not the natural interest in his tastes which would have made him able constantly to enjoy them alone; and when he had suggested that she should go with him to see the pictures, she had instantly, if a little to his surprise, consented to do so. He had had some sense that he ought to combat any scruples she was not expressing, and he had said that the people they would see, and the one or two artists he would present to her, were broad enough to take things for granted. In Europe, he reminded her, one could with every grace have a history, and they were in the midst of a social order which acknowledged these aberrations even if it did not include them. She had only repeated her consent, without further comment. As he had watched her, across the luncheon table, the special spirit with which she did so seemed to him as rare as the blending of the browns and creams of her head with the lacquered cabinet behind her. He was never able to escape these assurances of her exquisiteness. It was not a question of what people shut their eyes to, but what she could not permit herself to shut her eyes to, the mute tightening of her lips appeared for a second to remind him. Yet this was an occasion when she had plainly understood that he was too interested to want to be bothered by her uncertainties. She had discarded them and lapsed into a manner as sober and detached as the tint of her dark plain dress, as she began to ask him about the exhibition and the men of whose works it was composed.

It had been the natural consequence of the isolation which came with their happiness that Irish should have

had few opportunities to judge her, except from his own point of view. Though he believed he knew her intimately it was a revelation to him, when they entered the gallery, to see how her wonderful composition of herself held and the combination of the vividness of her charm with her gracious self-effacement. As his attention had gradually wandered from the pictures and he had settled himself to watch her, across the crowd, what had struck him most had been this incorruptible sense of fitness in her—the dignity of her smile at a man and the ease of her tacit avoidance of whatever lady accompanied him. The cleverness with which she exercised her judgments did not end there. Lately Irish had frequently been struck by the way he could count on the discretions of her taste. It was not only that she was keenly aware of line and colour and that her visual faculty was as alert and as sensitive as the rest of her. She had also that sobriety and reserve of judgment which, he thought, beyond anything else, meant the successful appreciation of the artist's idea. Her opinions had the soundness of conclusion which is not acquired by any zeal but which comes as the spontaneous recognition of what is good. When he had told her that she had a scent of the same sort, even if it weren't as educated, as Fresneuil's, her acceptance of what he said proved to him further how natural the quality was in her. Merely as a quality, she said, it did not interest her. Her sole business was to please him; and she would leave matters of taste to him, since, as her light wit was always ready to acknowledge, in its more personal form it had been his taste which made him care for her.

She had been the first woman to show him that she could merge the personal and the impersonal to this extent, and the result had been an undoubted deepening and broadening of his feeling. When they had arrived in London it had been she who made him for the first time understand why he had so carefully arranged his house there, and why he had had a sense of its reservation for some special future. He had managed to get the house some years before, attracted by the warm tones of the bricks and the slimness of the columns around the Georgian portico. It had stood empty for some time, and later he and Fresneuil had amused themselves, at odd moments, by placing a few delicate things in the small square rooms, whose sober elegance of proportion was so far rarer than magnificence. Once Anne-Marie was established, she had shown him how she explained the house and how it fitted her. He saw now why he had kept everything a faded blue, so old that its surface was dusted lightly with a silvery grey, why he had brought here his best Venetian glass and his best blacks and whites, and why he had given orders that only the palest yellow roses were to be put in the vases. He hadn't only felt the premonition of what ought to go with her, he said, but he had also foreseen the necessary restraint. It had made him careful to use things so good and so few of them that now she could add the last touch to it and fill it with herself.

It had been during the winter months that he had learned that their life together could settle into steadiness and yet continue to be as extraordinary. Irish could not guess how she managed it. But somehow

she always contrived to be what he wanted her to be and to compose herself to suit his mood as flawlessly as he could compose a room. The perfection of her conduct had its constant implications, like the colours reflected in a fine crystal. She had made the house, in intimate ways, characteristic of their feeling. It was her idea that only the most necessary people should see her here, and that, without any proclamation or any false accent, they should completely preserve their privacy. She had said that she wanted the house to exist only as it existed for them, and that they must keep it full of a silence which was beyond disturbance. Yet if she could be stimulative she could be restful. He had accused her once of being able to leave behind her her very character, in order to become, for the moment, the person whom it would most please him to have her; and he remembered now, as he watched her, the gravity with which she had accepted this phrase as a compliment.

He was dimly conscious that she was only the more charming because she so plainly admitted that she had everything to gain from adroitness. She never attempted to deny that she stood on the edge of a precipice over which most women are forced before they see it. The long tradition of custom in her taught her to use this menace as a weapon and to keep the sharpest eye on the turn of the wind. She had not the slightest capacity for companionship. But she was so absorbed in managing matters to the end of his happiness that companionship became too superficial a word for so complete an understanding. She had learned when to have a light quarrel, when to be gay and when grave, when to send him out and when to beg him not to leave her. As he

had felt the instincts of her race at work, behind the guard of her quick smile, he had had to acknowledge the varied quality of her enchantment.

Irish had admitted at once his dependence upon the manipulation which had seemed to Cushing so insincere. Lately he had sometimes wondered if her responses had not perhaps a suggestion of a too perfect preparation. Yet his uncertainties were dispelled by the ardour in her very subtlety. Had he ever, for instance, seen a woman give a man a look as eloquent as that which, across the shifting lines of people, she sent him now? It was first a friendly reassurance that he need not trouble about her—that she was enjoying herself. Little by little it deepened to a reminder of the invisible bond between them and of the history of their hours together. She could look at him in a way which made him see not only her eyes but the intensity of his own, when their reflection rose slowly to the surface of hers.

He found himself making his way through the crowd to join her, before he was aware of it; and as they turned by mutual consent to the outer room, where they had left their wraps, they came face to face with Fresneuil. He explained that he had just arrived, from a be-lated Channel boat, and since he had heard at the house where they were, he had followed to ask if his employer had any instructions for him.

Irish greeted him with his usual disregard of any interests but his own and with all the enthusiasm for which, in Fresneuil's absence, there was no other outlet.

"Thank heaven you're back! Did you ever see such lamentable things? There's one man you might watch for me—those little landscapes are his, and he's got

quality in him. No, don't report what you've got—there's time enough. Look! I've just made up my mind: I must have Madame du Chastel painted."

Anne-Marie held back for the briefest instant. It was a life of quick decisions, and in her pause she had made her choice. Since she had wilfully exposed herself to this kind of implied rudeness, she must accept it with a good grace. "*Mais bonjour, monsieur*—how do you do?" she said to Fresneuil, with a smile. "You perceive that Mr. Irish is as intent as ever on his projects, do you not?"

"You don't mind, Anne-Marie? You will sit for some one?"

"But certainly, if you wish."

"Whom could I trust to do her? Who's just the right person?"

Fresneuil, who had bowed formally over Anne-Marie's hand, appeared to enter into the conversation with his usual imperturbability, if a little against his will. "I hope you won't try it. It's sure to fail; Madame du Chastel can't be painted—it's out of the question."

"And why not, I should like to know? She's made to be painted; look at her!"

"*Voyons, mon ami*——" Anne-Marie interposed hastily. "Leave monsieur to his own judgment!"

Fresneuil's smile seemed to thank her and yet to assure her that he needed no aid. "It would be quite useless. It's hopeless with people who correspond too perfectly—who are really too good."

"She's too good, then? If that's all——!"

"It is all"—Fresneuil was evidently sure of himself—"just that. It's more than enough. Her outer and

her inner self correspond. She couldn't sit as most people sit. She'd force too much of herself on the canvas, and that would spoil what—I grant—is her amazingly paintable quality. If madame were nothing more than the way she looks——! You permit me, madame? You have painted yourself better than any one can ever paint you." His habit of life had cured him of gestures, but he made one of his rare ones now. "You are finished. When the few people like you risk portraits——"

Anne-Marie's smile lingered on his face. "You consider it such a risk?"

"Definiteness is a risk, is it not?" His shoulders rose. "Especially when the indefinite—you allow me again?—is of such a perfect quality. Of course if you prefer, Mr. Irish, I will look some one up——"

Irish frequently made a semblance of disregarding his secretary, but the habit of his deference to so good a judgment had entered deeply into their relations, and now he let the matter go, with an air which suggested that at least he had the satisfaction that an expert paid such a tribute to his good fortune. "Oh, if you think I'm going to risk anything as horrible as the banal portrait——!" he exclaimed. He turned to Anne-Marie. She was going? But why, when there were endless points which Fresneuil had arrived just in time to give them!

"No, no; I have amused myself—yes, enormously, but I must go. You have so much to talk over with Monsieur de Fresneuil. I have an errand, and it is unpardonable to impose errands on a man. *Alors, je me sauve.* You are dining with me?"

It was one of her formalities to assume that he might prefer to spend the evening elsewhere; and though

Irish always smiled at it, this insistence on his independence gratified him none the less. "Of course I'll dine—I've nothing else on earth to do. And about the portrait; while we're here I'll convince Fresneuil. You'll see!"

Anne-Marie turned back from the doorway. In the past months she had grown accustomed to the quick shift of Fresneuil's black eyes from her to Irish and from Irish back to her. She had a persistent sense that his comments, mute as they usually were, had a significance more important than the fact that they were the only comments which could reach her. It was perhaps because of his own suggestion of an impeccable standard, or of the intensity of his power of differentiation. But she was increasingly aware that he expressed a constant test—that he continually reminded her of what she could and could not risk.

"No, I think he is right. I shall not try it—I have changed my mind. Monsieur has warned me: if I were placed on a wall you would always be trying, my dear Arthur, to solve me, to define me, to see whether this or that were true." The look she sent Irish was full of gaiety, yet it had a light trace of some memory of her former life. "And when you Americans try to define me, I lose all my charm—I become merely tiresome," she ended.

They were to see Fresneuil again the next evening. Irish was impatient about the transaction of any business, but his secretary had repeatedly warned him that there were some imperative letters to be signed, and when he and Anne-Marie rose from the dinner table they

heard that Fresneuil had arrived—in London he had his own small flat and he came to Stratton street only on Irish's summons—and was awaiting them in the library.

As Fresneuil read over document after document and discussed with Irish the question of the transfer of a set of water-colours to the New York collection, Anne-Marie watched, from her deep chair beside the fire, the contrast between the two. It was when they were together that Irish had more than ever the stamp of the amateur who pursues his object desultorily. She found herself wondering now what the shade of difference was. His constant effort had been to sensitise himself. Yet he had succeeded in doing so only superficially and never profoundly; and something in the definiteness of Fresneuil's own quality suddenly reminded her of the difference between the way in which Irish denied the American spirit and the way in which Cushing had insisted upon it.

Irish's attention wandered so much that his secretary, after half an hour, reduced matters to the barest formalities. He was obviously as relieved as they when he rose and gathered up his papers. "That's all. I regret so much that I had to trouble you; and—by the way—before I go I want to give you this."

Irish took the little box he held out. "Something you've picked up?"

"Yes—if one calls such a thing capable of being picked up. It's an emerald—a ring. Blum had it in Paris when I passed through, and he thought you would like to see it. It's been in two collections—the Tremholz emerald, they call it; Tremholz brought it from India forty years ago and set it. I arranged that I shouldn't commit you.

There's nothing binding. Blum wants a small fortune for it, but I suppose"—he broke off, as he laid his hand upon the door, and as his eyes went from Irish to Anne-Marie they had a touch of irony—"I suppose if one wants those things enough——"

"It's deep?" Irish asked, tearing the wrappings from the box.

"Very—large and flawless. I had Rayner's expert see it, in case you should want to keep it. He agrees with me. It's flawless and extraordinarily rare."

"But you yourself, monsieur, you will show it to us?" Anne-Marie raised her head, with a light insistence behind the graciousness of her smile.

"You're very good, madame, but I must go." She saw that there was again something like raillery in his glance, as if he recognised that he was always in the position of leaving them at the right moment. "Good night; good night, Mr. Irish."

He had calculated carefully, and as the door closed behind him Irish drew out the ring. A single exclamation broke from him and from Anne-Marie, followed by Irish's quick comment that one might have known Fresneuil would run down such a thing. They bent together, for a moment, over the deep green stone, a soft and brilliant sea, lying in an old silver setting and with the lightest lacework of diamonds breaking against its edge; then Irish impulsively slipped it on her bare hand. "Of all wonders—the thing I've always wanted for you!"

"But, Arthur, look at it! It's too magnificent, it's too unbelievable! Ah, what one feels it's seen, what one feels it knows!"

"Didn't I always say I would give you anything and

everything, but not a ring, until I found the perfect one?" He faced her for a second and then raised her hand impulsively to his lips. "Anne-Marie, I beg you—do marry me!"

"My dear boy, is that the way it makes you feel?"

"I don't know how to say what it makes me feel. I only know that I can't somehow couple you with things as they stand. I don't know why—I can't help it. I want all of life to match you as beautifully as this does." He hesitated again. "Don't you see? I want to protect you as I can't protect you now."

"How foolish, my dear!" she returned lightly; yet her expression, as she turned the ring here and there in the for this sort of thing."

"I know," Irish insisted, "and you don't. No, it won't do. It's all very well to talk, but you're not the person for this sort of thing."

She shook her head, with a quick sigh. "No, it is too late. If we were to marry now—*tiens!* But it is the ring itself which settles it! Could a man marry a woman to whom he gave such a thing?"

"But I'm serious——"

She interposed. "And I also. If you give me a ring like this, it is settled. Ah, my dear, if we married you would give me other things, but nothing quite like this! One must admit it of your Fresneuil," she smiled; "he has his wit."

"But you must see my point!" Irish flushed, in his evident sincerity. "I want you to have the very best; oh, I know these things, and I tell you I can't couple you with anything but the best." He paused and his flush deepened. "No, I'll admit it to you: I can't under-

stand you. I can't understand why you don't *want* to marry," he ended.

"Ah!" she held herself for a moment and then broke out: "But you are all alike, are you not?"

"We're alike, the best of us, in decency, I should hope."

"The moral sense—marriage—one scents them in all of you. You cannot look on a *liaison* except as degrading!" She lifted her hands to his shoulders. "*Bon*, my dear, but it is too late. I will be frank too. Our only chance is not to marry."

"You think it would fail?"

"I know it. The best chance in our circumstances is the one we have taken."

"It's incredible you should really think so, if you understand the risks," he was beginning, but she took him up again. "They are not as bad as the risks the other way. I have had my lessons." She put it with a touch of pride. "Come; let us waste no more time. Let us return to my ring."

Irish continued to look at her in silence. His own life of the intellect, if it had weakened his personality in some directions, had nevertheless enabled him to see in her what Cushing had never suspected the existence of. He was conscious of this, and of the enjoyment which her intricacy—an intricacy refined to its component and simple parts—had given him. Yet to-night, for the first time, in the ease with which she had thrown the proprieties to the winds, he felt how alien all her standards must be; and there seemed to him something almost dangerous in her exquisite and perfect logic.

XXI

ANNE-MARIE had frankly recognised that one of her chief difficulties was that she could never foresee those trivial turns of event in which the greatest risk to her situation showed itself. The next day Irish woke feeling flushed and ill; not so ill as to make actual alarm—and alarm, as she reflected, would have matched the emotional tensivity of the household—but ill enough to be querulous and uncomfortable, and to change his usual demands upon her into the mere need of attention.

While they awaited the doctor whom she had instantly summoned, she devoted herself to tending him; and as she moved quickly and quietly about, with an elaboration of care in the arrangement of his pillows and his medicines, Irish had admitted that her every gesture was suited to a sick room. But as his discomfort became more acute and wore on his nerves, she could see that the lack of any expertness in her tenderness, in spite of the charming way in which she exercised it, struck him as incompetent. She could so eloquently assure him of her sympathy for his pain, she heard him murmur to himself, and yet she could not seem to understand that the care of illness was a matter of keeping off draughts rather than of the introduction of drama.

Irish had specially asked her to avoid being discovered in his room; and when, because of her failure to be on the watch, the doctor found her bending anxiously over him, his annoyance visibly increased. There was another element besides that of his desire to be let alone to

add to his discomposure. This was the first time that she and her position had been in question, not with a dealer or some one of Irish's heterogeneous retinue, who accepted her as they accepted all his eccentricities, but with a man who might perhaps know Cushing. The doctor was an American living in London, sharp and terse and with the home standards; and as he crossed the threshold of the room, his single glance at Anne-Marie and the alacrity with which he placed her showed both her and Irish that such fears had their foundation.

Irish did his best, however, to carry it off with courtesy, and he formally presented the doctor to Madame du Chastel. As her head bent in response, he had to grant that her dignity was never more perfect than when it was in question.

"I am in great anxiety about Mr. Irish," she said clearly. "His condition alarms me, and I must ask you to give me the very fullest report of how you find him."

"I shall be happy to do so, when I've examined him;" the doctor's smile implied his understanding. "But whatever's wrong with him—and I hope it's nothing much—anxiety won't help. We don't consider it the best tonic for patients."

"But I am anxious—very anxious. You will tell me frankly what you think?"

"Oh, of course he will," said Irish. "Go into my sitting room, if you will, and we'll call you when he's finished with me."

"But I want to ask——"

"I prefer that one shouldn't ask, just now. It's charming of you, but do go."

"You will both remember that I really must know everything?"

"Of course, of course." Irish's impatience shook his voice a little.

She forgot the doctor in a flash. "But, Arthur, I only meant——"

"Ah, it's so good of you, but for heaven's sake let us get the thing finished!"

It appeared that the doctor had only reasssuring news for them. Irish's only trouble was a heavy cold on the chest, and he could inform Anne-Marie when she returned that all that was necessary was constant care: as if, he was obviously thinking, one could suppose a person of this aspect capable of following instructions. The too wide experiences of a physician had perhaps indurated him and made him too quick in his judgments. As he looked at Anne-Marie more closely his manner gained some accent of consideration.

"Madame du Chastel need not worry," he addressed himself both to her and to Irish. "If you're careful you will be up in a few days. Keep Mr. Irish perfectly quiet, madame, and we shall see marked improvement to-morrow."

She rewarded him for his change of tone. "You are very kind. I will fulfil your orders—ah, but with all the faithfulness of which I am capable. Yes. He looks a little stronger, does he not? Such a cruel climate as it is! But if I raise the curtain—there, he has more colour! Do you see?"

The sincerity of her concern drew the doctor's eyes to her again. He was evidently wondering if it might be one of the injustices of fate which opposed the poise of

her head and her delicately drawn features to Irish's irritability. The kindness in his tone deepened as he spoke again. "You really must believe me—the thing's entirely simple. Count upon my telling you the exact truth."

"Oh, all I need is rest and care!" Irish insisted, with the clearer air of the situation allowing him to admit his ill-temper.

"Yes, rest and care. And before I go"—the doctor had risen, with his eyes still on Anne-Marie—"I beg your pardon, but will you allow me a liberty, madame? I have a hobby—unfortunately it's one I can't very largely gratify—but in my way I've a small collection of precious stones. May I ask you if that's the Tremholz emerald?"

"This? My ring?"

"Yes—the one Blum has lately had. It was on view in Paris, last autumn."

"*Mais oui*; did not Monseigneur de Fresneuil say it came from Blum, Arthur? You collect stones, monsieur?"

"Yes, as I can and when I can. They're of immense interest to me—emeralds especially. I went to see this—ah, thank you, may I look at it?—and it's a pleasure to see it again."

"And can you imagine," she had handed him the ring and she now turned upon Irish a look of eloquent tenderness, "the pleasure it is to me to own it!"

Her voice broke and dropped, in a painful embarrassment; before her words were finished she had caught Irish's sharp flush of anger and the confusion in his face. She hesitated, murmured some good-bye, and hurriedly quitted the room.

When Irish saw her again his first news was that, on

her leaving them, the doctor had said he must have a nurse. "I shall be in bed for some days at least, and I really ought, you know, to have some one to look out for me."

Anne-Marie held her reply for a moment. Perhaps what perplexed her most was his delay in reproaching her for what she supposed he felt was a fault of taste. The tears slowly rose to her eyes. Everything in the world appeared to hang in question. It was the first time she had dealt with him as instinctively and thoughtlessly as she had at times dealt with Cushing, and the lapse of her control threw her off her guard.

"I hope the nurse will not be young," was all she could trust herself to say.

"Oh, come, my dear, be reasonable! Of course I must have a nurse."

"Because I am incapable of taking care of you?"

"My child, don't you see that it's only decent that I should have a nurse?"

She looked at him with the clearest astonishment. "Decent?"

"Decent," Irish repeated. "I shall keep everything that touches you decent, if I can."

"Decent, decent!" Her prudence vanished. "Is it decent for me to love you as I do and not to take care of you? Is it decent for me to accept everything and give nothing? To see another woman tending you? Is our relationship only for the happiness of life?"

"It's not decent," Irish was patient but positive, "that you should in any way demean yourself."

"Oh," she cried, "your hideous view of women! I must be pampered and spoilt, but I may not do what

proclaims that I care for you. You regard that as degrading. Anything so long as one does not name a thing by the real name! Quick, send for a nurse! It is not decent that I should work for you and slave for you. Decent! And what do you call decency? *Tiens*, when he wanted, *ce docteur*, to see my ring and I implied to him that you had given it to me, you were angry. Was that not decent?"

"No; it wasn't. I had forced him—you had forced him—to treat you with respect, to disregard the situation; and by admitting that I gave you such jewels——"

Her wonder was so innocent now that Irish felt, as she stared at him, that he was seeing some essential of her character laid bare. "But did you not give it to me?"

"I did; of course."

"And to admit it—not to disregard it, you say——"

"To admit it admitted, in the superficial view, coarseness—pay," said Irish hotly.

"But, Arthur, be calm! But reflect! You would not have any one think you had so little appreciation of what I have done for you that you did not offer me these things. Pay can be noble; it would be indecent," she ended, "if you did not pay me!"

The look of incomprehension with which Irish closed the subject—a look of which she felt she had caught a faint foreboding on the preceding night—remained ceaselessly before Anne-Marie. It assumed an importance greater than the importance of the fact that because of his condition the vivid spectacle of their life together was temporarily reduced to the commonplace. Irish continued ill for a week or so; and while she moved restlessly from room to room, wondering how she could pass the

hours during which he slept or the hours during when her presence was plainly unwise for him, she had felt a change take place in herself. Between an unreasoning insistence on her own feeling and a recognition of what she must do to stimulate Irish's, there was now the separation of the sharp divisions of actuality.

His necessary isolation and hers had not only reminded her of how closely she must be on her guard. The practical resentment he had shown had warned her further. She knew he was a man whose impulses were spontaneous and beyond the influences of reflection. The fact that she could no longer count on her power to make her unreasonableness itself charm him had given her a glimpse of those forces which, under the general effulgence of her happiness, opposed and eluded her. She had admitted from the first that to hold Irish required an adroitness which reached the point of a science. Now she saw that if she were to succeed she must not only be clever and quick but that she must annihilate her own feelings. She must sacrifice not only her moods but her happiness itself in the interest of keeping his at the requisite pitch. For the first time she seemed to see herself standing with her back to a wall beyond which there was no escape, and fighting less to maintain a condition than to warn off the gradual approach of what she could scarcely yet discern.

She had gone one evening into her own sitting room, which gave, beyond a connecting corridor, upon Irish's library; and with her chair drawn to the fire she had let her meditation sink into a deep silence. The room was filled with an odour as rich as its contents—with what she always felt to be the actual aroma of priceless objects

—and the fumes of the fire were enriched by the scent of the flowers which stood on every table. She and Irish had united in allowing a little confusion here. The things he could not be sure he wanted for her—a delicate little statuette, a rose-coloured crystal vase, a first edition about whose authenticity there was a faint question, stood together on her desk, amongst the Cellini bowls filled with violets and the French fashion papers she had just run through. It was the room for which she cared most, she had always thought; less, perhaps, for its simple lines and for the elusive delicacy of the two Fragonards, over the old gilt consoles, than for this sense of a warm and changing life amongst the rarities which filled it.

The stillness of the house, even more marked than usual since Irish was trying to sleep, was broken by a quick knock at her door, and in response to a low word from her Fresneuil came in.

“I’ve finished Mr. Irish’s letters and I am just going; there is nothing more, I think?” He was lingering at the door, with his hand on the knob, and Anne-Marie felt his scrutiny pause upon her, waver, and then return to her again. “There is nothing, madame, that I can do for you?”

“Nothing; unless—” she smiled lightly, “unless you will give me a few moments of your time. It is one of those cruel English nights, is it not?—when the damp penetrates one’s blood——”

She had laid her book on the arm of her chair and had motioned Fresneuil, with her easy courtesy, to the chair opposite. In response to her invitation he came forward, not to seat himself but to lean over the back of the chair towards her. The crossed lights of the fire and

of the lamp at her elbow lit his face; and she saw that for the first time he prolonged and deepened the glance he cast at her.

Its quick intelligence arrested her. She had understood all along that there had not been a mental stage of the past months, which had now extended almost to a year, of which his instinct to strike to the kernel of fine situations had not made him aware. He was obviously and frankly able to recognise how little, in a relationship of so high a key, an outsider could count. Yet, for the first time, she felt she had not only a more open view of him than his carefully closed personality had ever permitted, but a view of his implication in her own affairs. It suddenly seemed to her that he resumed in himself the opinions and refutations of her own traditions and standards.

"I hear," she continued, "that you are again going over to Paris for a fortnight. Mr. Irish told me yesterday; he is quite helpless at the prospect." She sighed. "But I suppose it is the spring you want to catch—the spring which comes more beautifully in France than in any country in the world."

Fresneuil smiled. "Yes, it is true. There are February days—days almost upon us now—when in Paris one does catch it. It slants down into the narrowest and noisiest streets, it's in the coldest wind."

"You are not Parisian by birth." It occurred to her, as she spoke, how little she knew of his antecedents and she felt a slight astonishment—less at her ignorance than at her acceptance of the fact that they must necessarily resemble her own.

"No, no; we have our home in Burgundy. My mother,

when we were children, went sometimes to Paris for a month or two—to see her relatives or to hear the Lenten sermons at the Madeleine——”

“I know! And mine, the same way!” She smiled back at him. “But little as I was when my parents died, I can remember their contentment at coming home. It is only we modern ones who really know Paris, and we live such scattered lives—— Then you go, now, to your own people?”

“No; I shall be by myself. For the last three years or so I have kept, as well as my rooms here, a little flat in Paris. Whenever Mr. Irish can spare me, I run over.” He hesitated, and she had the odd sense that he then admitted her a step further into his scrupulously maintained reserve. “Such times are my times of *recueillement*.”

“You are fortunate to have them,” she said gravely; she had turned her eyes again to the fire. “Few of us have them. Our lives—the outward relations of our lives—usually demand our presence steadily. It has always been my dream that if one could have such a place to go to—one or two rooms, warm and sunny and filled with one’s self alone—one would really escape. It does not matter for how long one escapes; all that matters is the completeness of one’s emancipation, while it lasts.”

Fresneuil was silent for a moment. She could feel the steadiness of his look on her when he spoke. “True, madame; but when one’s life is brilliant and lovely, when it is a rare success——”

Anne-Marie was silent for longer than he. His implication had been as light and as courteous as his brief confidences to her. But she felt herself influenced by

the uncertainties of the past days, by the hour, the silence of the room and by Fresneuil's evident attention; and when she finally responded her voice had dropped to a lower and deeper note than any she had yet let him hear. "Ah, but that is it! It is never possible to look for continued success when one fights against custom."

He answered instantly, though his own tone remained as courteous and as distant. "No. That is of course true."

"My task, in my life," she pursued, with her voice still low, "is to postpone a day of reckoning."

"Yes, madame, that I can imagine; and for that one needs," Fresneuil's shoulders rose and fell, "for that one needs a sustained power of stoicism."

She did not reply, and after another pause Fresneuil gathered up the papers he had laid on the table nearest him. His consideration evidently kept him silent. With a quick glance, which registered her absorption in her own thoughts, he turned to the door. He had half opened it when she again spoke abruptly. "Tell me, monsieur—should you say I had it, that sustained power of stoicism? When I think of what we women have to keep off, to keep out, to keep inexplicable——!" She broke off, with one of her quick sweeping gestures.

Fresneuil bowed. "Life as you live it is magnificent; you will let me say that?"

She caught his eyes and held them steadily. "But just the magnificence is that it must ultimately fail."

"Ah, *quant à cela*—yes; it must ultimately fail." He seemed for a moment about to say more, and then he lapsed into his usual manner. "There were no more

orders from Mr. Irish, then? Thank you, madame; good night."

XXII

SHE chose the first afternoon that Irish was able to go out to broach to him the plan which was the first result of the warning she had so frankly recognised and accepted. They had gone together to Kensington Gardens and had settled themselves at a little table under the trees for tea. Now that the earth began to smell so good and the air to soften, it was worth such *bourgeois* surroundings, she said, to be able as one drank one's tea to look at the first fresh tint of the turf and the light glancing along the branches.

She had tried all afternoon to be singularly charming—perhaps preparing the way, in her astute manner, for what she had to say. Yet, as she put down her cup and looked across at him, her purpose to do anything but accept thankfully whatever he gave her hung dangerously on the brink of revulsion. He had lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair, with one of his crossed feet swinging and his hands absently twirling his stick. His eyes, with their habitually critical expression, were watching the pale greys and mauves of the soft English afternoon. The air and the attitude were his most typical, and they drew to her eyes a look of tenderness.

It had been a necessary complement of her feeling for Irish that her own critical instinct should not cease to act. Her sharp sense of contrast had given her experiences with him a deeper charm. Irish's greatest attraction for her lay in her recognition of the juxtaposition of the

elements in his character. She enjoyed his cleverness the more because of his self-insistence. He had not been born to the understanding of beauty, like Fresneuil. He had rather had to pay the penalty of his racial quality, and it was undeniable that he had not a definite enough flavour to make his dilettantism altogether excusable. She had frequently compared these facts with her remembrance of her husband. It was true that Cushing had insisted upon a view of life which Irish disregarded. Yet she had plainly seen the ultimate resemblance between the two. Her knowledge of Irish had taught her that he had just missed leading a conventional life, as he had just missed the simpler enjoyment of his pleasures. If on the one hand he had some of the trained egoism which exists in men who regard their pleasure as separate from chivalry, and chivalry itself more as a manner than as an ideal, he had, on the other, a consideration for women which was always verging on the point of shyness.

She began with that air of abruptness which she could yet make so finished. "My dear, I do not tell you often enough how delightful you are!"

Irish turned from his contemplation of the trees to smile at her, and she continued: "You have enormous quality—enormous. Here we have seen nothing but each other for months, and I am still learning you. Can I ever, I wonder, be as much of a secret to you as you are to me?"

"If you think you're what's called obvious!" he retorted.

Anne-Marie laughed. "Ah, do you suppose that I am so naïve that I think a man wants a woman to continue forever to be a secret to him? Before he has established

his sentiment—yes, that is conceivable. But later, when they have a real ground to stand on, he does not want the disturbance of uncertainty. And with us women it is so different!”

“You mean that you yourself are always uncertain?”

“Always; one never knows, you know,” she retorted wisely; “and specially with you! And though I know all the risks, that is why it will be hard for me to leave you.”

“And who talks of leaving?”

“But I do.”

“But how preposterous! What on earth do you mean?”

“Hush, Arthur, hush! You will disgrace yourself. Ah, I shall not leave you forever! But I have made up my mind that I cannot go on living all the time with you—that I cannot go on in Stratton street.”

“But the thing’s unthinkable! We worked it out before we left home, and we settled on London as a permanency. Paris wouldn’t do, New York wouldn’t do. We never for a moment considered anything else. It was all planned, all thought out.”

“And I know better than plans.” She carried it off gaily. “No, I do not hurry you. I merely tell you my decision. Somewhere in the country you will find a house for me. That will be my home, I shall live there. Whenever you please you shall come to me—for days, weeks, months, as you want. I may sometimes scandalise the world and come to you.”

“But what’s to be gained, except the added inconvenience of travel?”

“The gain is that I shall not always be on your hands.”

“And that’s a gain?”

"The difference between the expected and the unexpected is the gain."

"Oh, come, my dear, a difference of *nuance*——"

She nodded. "A difference of *nuance*, I admit; but in our situation *nuance* is of infinite importance. Come! Take your time! We can go about in the motor and hunt for something, can we not? And you shall choose whatever you prefer. You have said the English country is sometimes amusing. *Du courage!* You will see!"

"But you can't seriously mean it! The house in Stratton street—why, it's become yours; and to be there only rarely, to be lost in some beastly wilderness when you love a city so——"

"Ah, if I love a city!" Her look wandered across the long stretch of green to the trees which bound it and to the line of houses discernible beyond. "If I love London! Listen—do you hear it? What a magnificent sound! I could not understand it at first; but now what it has taught me! London knows emotions, it knows the best brilliancy and power. Those houses, so dignified, so compact, are full of the secrets of an old, old life. It is not decorative, like Paris, it is not young—at once eager and malevolent—like New York. It is clever, it is deep. It knows more than any city in the world. *Mais si*, that is it. It knows situations of distinction," she turned back to him, "situations like ours."

"The way you do things!" Irish exclaimed. His eyes played on her with amusement. "The way you can couple life and eternity with your own case, the way you are always the most modern lady of the most modern French drama—! How do you manage it—always to talk as if you expected to be written down?"

"And why should one not put the best of one into talk?" she retorted. "As if talk were only for the exchange of banalities! And when one is stirred by such a subject—!"

"Yet when you feel like that you can consider leaving Stratton street?"

"I can even leave Stratton street," she rejoined firmly; "I can even leave that house which has been my heaven—the house which, when I grow old and wrinkled and hideous, I shall remember above everything else. I shall remember—ah, you know all I shall remember. But because I love it, it instructs me. No, I must go."

Irish was unconscious that his response paid tribute to her astuteness. "Oh, well, if you insist," he declared, "I shall be so endlessly bored!"

Anne-Marie secretly thought it a reward for the effort her decision cost her that, since her ideas of the country were vague, the appropriate place was not easy to find. To begin with they had looked for a house near town, within easy motoring distance, and she had had her plans of constant visits to the crowded thoroughfares to console her. But Irish's taste and hers were equally difficult to suit. He insisted that he could not see her in the ordinary country residence, and she on her side was always in dread of the dampness, of the proximity of animals and of the country sounds.—Yet she would not permit him to laugh the matter off. Somewhere, she insisted, there must be a house neither too large nor too small, with the dignity of its own park—a place which had seen some history; and after some weeks of fruitless search even Irish had to grant that they had found

the right thing. He had heard one day, through the acute Fresneuil, that by some miracle Morte was in the market, a Dorsetshire manor house famous for the grace of its twirled chimneys and the beauty of its Elizabethan mantels; and when they went to inspect it his enthusiasm had made Anne-Marie feel that, in spite of the three hours' journey from town, she must not hesitate in her consent.

Once she had overcome her first instinctive distaste, she found that she could see in her surroundings their own charm. There was no county more essentially English than Dorset, Irish was fond of saying, none where Constable could so typically have worked; and yet its network of lanes and meadows, merging sharply here and there in the broad sweep of downs, had none of the monotony she dreaded. It was not the garden-like compactness of the French landscape, but one full of a more compact racial tradition. She admitted that she liked the villages, that their air of grave self-sufficiency was as eminently suited to the English character as the stolidity of the oaks and the sentimental drop of the elms, though she herself preferred trees which were formed and intelligent. Her pleasure was actual. Yet Irish had to admit that her appreciation itself was formalised and critical. In the last analysis she regarded nature itself as a background and as accessory to her own effects. Her imagination never got beyond the palpable. She could make an apt phrase about the different greens through a soft grey rain or about the beauty of a sunset, but she was incapable, as she constantly reminded him, with a shrug, of drawing ethical deductions from them. He gradually began to see that her pleasure in the new setting of her

life had its foundation less in the beauty of Morte than in the appropriateness with which it framed her.

Irish knew that it was one of the gifts of her type of sensitiveness that she felt the spirit of houses and had the secret of extracting from them their inmost personalities and amalgamating them with her own. He remembered that even her difference with Cushing's house had been in perfect taste, and that she had seemed to treat it with no less consideration than the house in Stratton street which so eminently suited her. Her comprehension of Morte was more deeply rooted. It was when he saw the sober elegance with which she responded to its countless implications that he felt for the first time the height of the aristocracy in her own tradition. The lovely rooms in Stratton street, she had always told him—and though she could never again care for rooms so completely—had been too egotistical. They were merely his and hers, a background which he had exquisitely composed for her. Irish himself understood that her sympathy with Morte was profounder. Order was the word which best expressed its essence, a carefully sifted order, slowly deposited by generations, which had coloured the bricks, smoothed the lawns and softened the echoes. It was not a vast house but one of large and noble proportions, and it achieved on all sides a quality of the rarest distinction. This impalpable air was the one which Anne-Marie so perfectly matched. There was something in her manner, as she descended the sweep of the staircase or sat opposite him in the sombre dining room, whose carvings were unequalled in that part of England, which reminded Irish that this was the spaciousness and the grace to which she was fundamentally accustomed. She

could even contrive that in such exacting surroundings she and Irish should take on some appearance of order too, and that her little morning room, where they passed most of their time, should have its own conventionality and dignity. In the past months her loveliness, without any loss of quality, had inevitably become more suggestive of her experiences; now Morte appeared to finish the history registered in her by adding a touch of austerity to her demeanour, and she moved with something of the old tread of her race.

It was not one of her weaknesses that she hesitated over the fulfilment of her bargains, and Irish was never to know the intimate misery it had cost her to leave a city. In spite of all her courage she had hours of longing for a life where the conditions were more nearly the artificial ones she best understood, and when she felt the need of an audience to see the elegance with which she trailed and swept about the gardens. But her sense of fitness held, and she refused as inappropriate Irish's vague attempts to change the routine of things. Of course she couldn't have people to stop with her; first of all, let him think of the only people who would come, and fancy the result! This was of course not America, but neither was it France, he must remember. It was not enough to say it was her house; any one with half an eye knew it wasn't—she herself knew it wasn't, and that was enough. She would never receive people under false pretences; that was vulgar, and whatever she did she would disdain vulgarity.

Irish honestly tried to solve the question. He had found her one morning, musing amongst the rich moist

scents of the rose garden, which had now all the splendour of June, and her idleness and her listlessness had suddenly brought before him the pathos of her immolation. "Very well, then, if you don't want to try people—though there are dozens I could bring down—why not interest yourself in something here? We can build a little glass house and you can grow orchids. I'll see the head man about it."

"Ah, Arthur, how can you speak to me of such things! Look! Is Morte the modern English house, or even the modern old English house? It is grave, sweet, silent; and can I put orchids here? How horrible, how incongruous!"

"It's all very well to say horrible and incongruous while I'm here to cheer you; but what on earth is to happen when I go? I can't, you know," he ended, unaware of his own gradual change of front, "indefinitely stay."

She turned her soft bright eyes on him. "I know; of course not; I am quite ready to have you go."

"But what is to amuse you? Can you endlessly do nothing?"

"I have agreed to a life which condemns me to do nothing."

Irish flung himself back in his garden chair, with a touch of annoyance. "The way you seem to think it all out!"

Her lips lifted in the lightest smile, scarcely as much a smile as a recollection which she took with a light wit. "And can you Americans never understand that—not even you, who are the American without any America?"

But of course, my dear; how foolish I should be if I did not think it all out!"

"And you foresaw that you'd sit with your hands folded for the rest of your days?"

"I foresaw that I should from time to time learn that I am too good—" she hesitated—"for what I have done. One is what one is, after all." Her shrug conveyed to him the inaccessibility of the caste to which she belonged.

"I wonder," said Irish abruptly, "if you're much changed!"

"You mean by all this affair? Ah, yes; immensely."

"How?"

She watched one of the white peacocks trail from the turf to the path and back to the turf again. Her pauses had protracted themselves since she came to Morte, and she raised one hand and held it between the sun and her eyes before she spoke, noting the effect of the light upon the fine creamy skin. "It brings a tremendous change to a woman," she finally said, "to know that she can create the happiness I can create for you."

"My dear, you're wonderful—there's no doubt of that."

"One does not make a man feel such deep things and remain the same."

"There's the marvel of you European women: you do change, you do feel. And you, above all and above every one." He released the hand he held. "Yet I still don't see what you're to do when I'm gone."

"I am to enjoy the emotion of waiting for you," she retorted lightly.

"Emotion!" he echoed, giving her back her own tone of banter; and he was surprised to see, for the second

time during the talk and because of his exclamation, that the touch of some swift memory again passed across her face. Her eyes darkened under it, and she turned in her chair and caught his arm. "Arthur, do you realise what it means? That every line of our life together has been written with all that was best in me, and yet that some day it will be finished?"

"There, I warned you!" Irish exclaimed impatiently; "that's the trouble of living in the country! It makes people hysterical."

XXIII

ANNE-MARIE paused for a moment, looking mutely at the card she held.

She was conscious that the footman waited in the doorway behind her and of his covert observation, in spite of the immobility with which he stood and the correctness with which he held his silver tray. To see that every minor form of finish was observed at Morte had been one of the efforts of her pride, and the sense that everything was smoothly and carefully conducted, even down to the routine of the servants, had helped to give her a sense of order. But in these moments she seemed for the first time to feel the futility of any of the outward signs of convention in the midst of so palpable an infringement of all larger rules. To read the name on the card she held, "La baronne von Alfons," surmounted by the princess's crown which was her cousin's by birth, meant scarcely so much that Mimi had looked her up and had managed to find her as the strangeness of the fact that

this should be the first visitor to Morte who had a definite place in the world of accepted conventionalities.

When she passed through the doors of the largest drawing room, which the servants ceremoniously opened for her, the impression deepened. It was the first time she had received any one here; perhaps this accounted for the fact that Madame von Alfons had not been taken to a smaller and more intimate room and showed that the servants too, in their way, felt it a pity not to put the magnificence of the house to some use. The sun of the mild July morning slanted down the long room and brightened the gilt of the consoles and the luminous beauty of the series of Romneys, hung on walls from which they had never been disturbed. Madame von Alfons' small figure, isolated in so large a space, and her own, as she advanced down the room, struck her as fitting such elegance. Yet as she caught her cousin's hands and touched her cheek with her lips, she felt that her face had warmed to a pink glow. "*Chère Mimi*, and you managed to find me—!"

"*Mais, ma toute belle*, it was not so difficult to manage!" her cousin returned lightly. She had raised her veil for their kiss and her dark eyes, fixed searchingly on Anne-Marie, continued the play of their curiosity when they were seated, side by side, on one of the old sofas. "You've somewhat concealed yourself, it is true; but," she turned to the room, "one doesn't conceal things like this!"

"It was charming of you, charming," Anne-Marie supplemented hurriedly. "No, of course you have heard—of course you have divined; I recognise that. One does one's best to be correct," she felt her cheeks a

deeper shade. "But there are, after all, things so beyond concealment——"

"Certainly—in the country and in England!" Madame von Alfons' shoulders rose. "Beyond concealment, perhaps; and yet they don't dare to talk openly of what they admit is beyond concealment. What a race! We're at Kingston, Ruprecht and I, with Lady Scotton. She knew the Morevens, who owned Morte, and of course she knew and knows every one and everything else. There you are. I had my own information, besides; so this morning I made up my mind to contrive to slip off and come to you." She saw that Anne-Marie winced at the suggestions of her phrase, and with a wave of her thin brown hand she motioned to the walls. "Ah, my dear, what pictures, what a house, what a room! But it is unbelievable, what these Americans do! They've even mastered discriminations, it appears. *Allons!* You have travelled some distance in the past year! But that it's brought you here, one so well understands!"

"Ah!" Anne-Marie put the sound of her dramatic instinct into the exclamation. "But does one? Does one understand anything—except that everything must be bought and paid for?"

"Yes, that of course is clear. But since, after your catastrophe, you were offered so charming an arrangement—and by a person who, as I am told, is very sympathetic——"

"Mr. Irish is exquisite, exquisite"; Anne-Marie remembered to have heard the term employed under similar conditions, at home in France, and to find herself using it gave her for an instant an odd sense of identity with Madame von Alfons' own methods. "But as you your-

self know," she supplemented—"enfin, one can only repeat it: things must be bought and paid for."

"And one's cleverness comes," her visitor returned, with a sudden depth to a smile which was a little worn, "in choosing the most agreeable payments? I myself, if I were your age again—ah! but if I were! If you asked me, I should say—" her glance passed from the *cloissoné* on the table at Anne-Marie's elbow to the grey pearl which hung at her throat—"if you asked me, my dear, I should say you had made everything pay for itself very well!"

"It has all been charming—yes." Anne-Marie bent her head in acquiescence. The quick change and interchange of her thoughts held her for a moment. She was aware of yielding to the stir of an inner rebellion. Something in her cousin's affectionate imperviousness woke in her an attitude of antagonism. "But the most charming things have their disadvantages; and mine, if I may say so, have ceased to be disadvantages which would appear disadvantages to you."

Madame von Alfons' smile appeared to follow the look she again sent around her. "Yes? Our sense of disadvantage has come to differ, you think? And do you remember, perhaps, the last time we met? Do you remember your life in an hotel in New York with any pleasure?"

"You were very good to me, *chère* Mimi—you showed me then every consideration——"

"But I show you a different consideration now? That offends you a little? And why should I not? My poor child, you were then in a position which was unfortunately false."

Anne-Marie's lips tightened. "And my position now——"

"Ah, yes! But there are false positions which are recognised and there are false positions which are merely vague and deplorable. That, I am sure, you will acknowledge." Madame von Alfons' even tones paused. "Look, if you prefer, at me. A divorce, a legal separation—*enfin*, they have both always seemed to me things one does not permit one's self. A woman who is in such a situation has neither the consolation of marriage nor the freedom of impropriety. You have chosen the freedom of impropriety. I—ah, well, one's arrangements must vary according to circumstances. Both Ruprecht and I have always observed what we had to observe. When he told me, for example, that he had banking interests in common with Lord Scotton, it was obviously my duty to come to England with him; it was obviously *dans le ton*, was it not? I had planned a charming trip of my own, too. It is such a delightful freedom that one can travel without comment nowadays, *à l'Américaine*. First I was going to my cure—*j'avais à me soigner un peu*; and then I planned to go off with young Gaston Morbéry, on his yacht—ah, a charming party——"

"But it is just there that you do not quite see!" Anne-Marie interposed quickly. "There is where we differ. I accept the difficulties of my *déclassement*—yes, I must accept them. But I have learned——" she felt the rise of her agitation—"I have learned that one cannot so calculate and arrange feeling! One has got, at moments, to surrender everything to it."

Mimi's face showed the clearest astonishment. "But surely, *ma petite*, you have not pretended not to yield

to your feeling! Your presence here, your relation with Mr. Irish——”

“But my relation with Mr. Irish is just what I have calculated. It was in my relation with my husband—it was even in my parting with him—that I let myself be governed by feeling. Yes!—It sounds ridiculous to you that one’s marriage should be like that, but that is the truth. For Mr. Irish I have planned and arranged; but for my husband it was different. We were unhappy, exceedingly unhappy.” She hesitated. “But there it is. When one has dealt with such a man one becomes incapable of petty calculations—yes, I tell you one becomes incapable of them!”

She was looking beyond her cousin’s neat black head to the open window, where she could see the soft play of the sunlight on the walks of the garden. For a second the refraction of the tears in her eyes made everything a bright blue. The pressure of her restrictions and her loneliness were as vivid to her as if they had visibly enclosed her. It had often struck her, of late, as one of the most unaccountable turns of chance that she should owe these sudden sensitivenesses in herself to Cushing. She knew how little he had left behind him, in her inner feeling, which she could honestly regret. Yet she more and more understood the contagion of his points of view and the lasting quality of some of the visions to which he had opened her eyes. He had shown her refinements of attitude and of the imagination. Her difficulty was, as she granted, with a quick sigh, that she had not been able to forget them.

She found Madame von Alfons’ eyes set on her, when

she turned, with a touch of shrewdness in their bland courtesy.

"Ah, yes. Mr. Cushing was of course a man *assez rare*. That one saw. His character, his quality—such things do not easily repeat themselves. But since you sacrificed them——"

"Yes; since I sacrificed them, I sacrificed them. And now you will tell me so many things I want to know; *tante* Louise has been ill, yes? I read it in the papers. And your children—*chers anges! Donne-moi donc de leurs nouvelles*——"

She sent for a garden hat and a sunshade when Mimi, with a sigh, said that though her hosts ate only cold food in the middle of the day, and that while they stood about talking, she must nevertheless start on her way back to Kingston House. They strolled together down the wide expanse of the park, Anne-Marie noting all the while the incongruous sound of their quick French under the oaks, to the lower gate, where, Madame von Alfons implied, some conveyance would await her. Anne-Marie had noticed the shade of reserve in the statement and her pride had forbidden her to question it. She had planned to bid her cousin good-bye when they reached the lodge; and they had just paused, for a last word, when Madame von Alfons' name was called from the opening of the drive, and, as the gate swung, they came face to face with a knot of people in the road.

This entrance to Morte gave upon the nearest way to the village, and the cottages were scattered thinly, with wide spaces between each. Yet a little crowd of people had gathered, around the figure of a lady who

now detached herself from their midst and approached Anne-Marie and her cousin. The deference of the villagers and their evident desire to fulfil her instructions had struck Anne-Marie no less instantly than the lady's appearance. Her quick ease, her simplicity and her carriage combined to make the declaration of a life and a position always beyond question. As she began to speak her graciousness had the perfection of a natural assurance. This was Madame du Chastel, wasn't it? She'd heard Madame von Alfons say so; and she, she must explain, was Lady Scotton, who lived at Kingston. She'd been waiting in the road, and five minutes before a dray had passed, and before she could rescue him it had run over her poor dog's leg. He was an Irish terrier, Anne-Marie would see, and they were such fun and so amusing! She had sent her carriage on to the veterinary's; but he lived well out on the Branksome road, and here was poor Patrick, only as comfortable as they had been able to make him on the grass. Would Anne-Marie be willing to give her a helping hand? If she could borrow a pony carriage—since the village wagonettes weren't the perfection of comfort—she and Madame von Alfons could drive the dog home without waiting for the veterinary. How fortunate, since it had to happen, that it had happened in this place! "I had agreed, you see," she explained, with charming frankness, "to meet your cousin here."

She let her light smile make her plea for her; and as she ended Anne-Marie was already aware of just how crucial the moment was. The curiosity of the knot of listening spectators was as vivid as a touch, and for the first time she felt concentrated upon herself the malice of

the neighbourhood. She had never admitted to Irish how careful she had been in regard to the villagers and how sensitive she was to their hostility. Her situation was beyond defence—they knew it from the servants in her household; and she had been only too thankful that respect for the size of Irish's fortune had made them at least outwardly apathetic. It was an occasion when her first care was to maintain every outpost of dignity. She took her time, closing her sunshade slowly, as she spoke, and fixing her direct look upon Lady Scotton.

"Certainly—but I shall be delighted." She turned to the lodge keeper. "You will order something from the stables immediately—yes? My pony carriage will be the best. The motion is very easy, and I do not think the dog will feel it."

"But really you're too kind; and poor Madame von Alfons, who'll be late for her luncheon——!"

Anne-Marie returned her look steadily. "Or there is sure to be something fairly comfortable—is there not?—at the rectory. I do not know, of course, but it seems likely that they have a good carriage; and you can send my man on there to borrow that, if you prefer."

"No, no; it's a pleasure to be indebted for such a kindness to you." Lady Scotton hesitated for an instant. "I saw you in the village one day—just in the distance. But I didn't realise then," she put it easily, "that you were the lady who lives at Morte."

"Yes; I live at Morte," returned Anne-Marie gravely. Their exchange of words had passed rapidly, but she was keenly aware that she had kept her self-possession intact. She could feel that the slim rigour of her attitude had made its impression, and that both her cousin's thoughtful

appraisal and the curious glances of the little crowd had to admit that she was leaving all the advances to her companion. Lady Scotton again apologised to Madame von Alfons for the delay, and then dispersed the people around her. "Thanks, but you needn't wait, since Madame du Chastel's good enough to see to it that we get home." She turned back to Anne-Marie again, with her smile. "This devotion in our villagers must be accepted as one of our institutions, you see. You're of course French—like your cousin?"

"Yes; I am French."

"And Morte; you like Morte?"

"But I admire and revere it." Anne-Marie yielded a little of her reserve. "No? Is it not stupendous?"

"Oh, I've adored Morte ever since I was tiny. It was always our plan, my husband's and mine, that we should buy it; but the Morevens asked such a sum, and we've our growing boys to start in the world. I'm only so glad—" she risked the dangerous ground—"that you're there, if you too love it."

"It's a great privilege—that I know." Anne-Marie turned. "Ah! And there is my carriage; you see—at the turn of the drive?"

Lady Scotton paused uncertainly. "I see. But if Madame von Alfons is willing—and since I know your stables are so near—wouldn't it perhaps be better to drive poor Pat there? Perhaps one of your men can see to him temporarily, and I could go on to the house with you and telephone home for a motor."

"Of course it is as you prefer." Anne-Marie's chin rose a little higher. "But since the carriage is here and the veterinary will be following you——"

"You think we'd better not?"

Anne-Marie made a brief gesture. "I should say you had better not." Her tone was as courteous as possible. But it plainly declared that she would do nothing to put upon so charming a person, almost old enough to be her mother, a sense of obligation too awkward in that it could not be acquitted. She would permit no slightest misapprehension concerning her own indignity.

The friendliness of Lady Scotton's eyes, however, and the kindness of her smile continued to confront her and appeared to assure her that in a life in which knowledge of the world had been a foregone conclusion there was some understanding of such situations. A wide experience had evidently shown her how rare it was to have to couple a young woman, of a delicacy of refinement which verged on frailness, with suggestions of impropriety. The older woman was plainly thinking how far cleverer and more delightful she looked than some of the coarsened creatures who keep their scandals attenuated to the point of passing muster. As she turned to get into the carriage, where Madame von Alfons had preceded her and where the dog was laid, she held Anne-Marie's hand warmly for a second and her look softened to a deeper sympathy. "My dear child," she seemed to say, "how ridiculous that I simply can't be friends with you!"

Anne-Marie betrayed her sense of the unspoken words by a touch of embarrassment. "It has been such a pleasure—to be able to help you," she said hastily.

"I do thank you, again and again; you've been charming," Lady Scotton hesitated; "and perhaps—I never know our plans, but perhaps sometime, when we're at Kingston—but we go there so irregularly, and principally

in winter! You know we English so ridiculously reverse our seasons!"

Anne-Marie appeared to recognise the hopelessness of the difficulty, and she turned to Madame von Alfons. "*Donc*, Mimi—you go to Deauville and then to Baden? And you will write—yes?" She drew back. "The groom has the necessary orders. I hope everything will go well and that the leg will be quite healed soon."

"Thanks once more. You see how it was—and he's such a dear, this puppy." Lady Scotton let her regret show plainly: "I am so grateful; and some day—let us at least say *au revoir*!"

Anne-Marie shook her head lightly and the intelligence of her smile put an end to any uncertainty. "*Adieu*, madame," she responded.

XXIV

ANNE-MARIE had walked slowly through the park and back to the house, with her eyes absently following the quiver of the light which penetrated through the foliage to the close short turf. It frequently struck her that she had no one to hurry for and no engagements to keep. She could foresee the sequences of each day exactly—first her silent luncheon, and then the drowsy hours of the afternoon, lengthening imperceptibly into the endless summer evening. There was always the accidental chance of Irish's arrival, since lately he had come and gone without warning and as his engagements permitted. It had been part of her scheme in coming to Morte that this uncertainty should make their happiness,

while they were together, brighter and more vivid for them both. She had foreseen the necessary reactions of loneliness in his absences, and she had contrived to meet them with spirit. But she was to-day more than ever conscious that her loneliness did not only mean her loneliness for him. Her talk with her cousin had stirred in her an instinctive defence of the less crass aspect of her situation. Yet something in her encounter with Lady Scotton had turned her back, and had shown her how inexorably people were bound, if not by Mimi's frank materialism, at least by the laws of conventionality.

Lady Scotton's trust of her—a trust so concrete that she would even have risked being seen to go in to Morte—had not only reminded her of the world to which she rightfully belonged. She had also realised what a person who kept up appearances, even to so questionable an extent as Madame von Alfons kept them up, could gain. It was not so much Lady Scotton herself who had struck her as important, except as she had the seasoned charm which privilege produces. Anne-Marie could imagine how she would continue to live, with her simplicity as distinguished and with all the prejudices of her impermeable type, even down to her sentimental love of animals. She might never be brilliant, but the very restrictions of such a woman were brilliant. It was the knowledge that these same rights were hers which gave Anne-Marie the strongest distaste she had yet had for her own indignity. She could not so obscure facts as to think that her happiness with Irish was a consolation for all her losses; and she had never been so convinced that the hardest penalty life exacted was displacement from one's natural position.

As she came into view of the house she saw a familiar figure on the wide steps, and she realised that, by an odd coincidence, Irish had arrived. She spared an exclamation of thankfulness to the fact that his motor must have entered by the main drive and that his meeting with Lady Scotton and her guest had thus been avoided. Since the older woman had managed everything else so well, she could also have managed such a contingency. Mimi, she was sure, had openly hoped to see him and had been disappointed not to find him at Morte during her visit. It was she herself who would have been the one to pay, and again because of her latent and tormenting sensitiveness. As she watched Irish stroll towards her, with his hands in his pockets, his head bare, and with the greeting of his quizzical smile, she suddenly felt the uselessness of her elaborate processes with him. The bare facts, as they existed—the knowledge of other people's knowledge, the consciousness that not a thing she wore did not in reality belong to him—were enough to repudiate the consistency of her refinement. Even in the last and most intimate outposts of her character, she must remember that she had been hurt: once she might not have known what the term defined, but now she knew that it meant that she had accepted the pleasure without the payment and the temporary without an honourable regard for the permanent. She stood abruptly still, under the last fringe of trees, with Irish only a few feet from her. Could it in reality be she who was elaborating all these morbid delicacies? The fact that they existed in her could not, after all, obscure the concrete fact that Morte stood there in front of her, at her service, and that the touch of Irish's arm, as he passed it through her own,

was more important than all these transmitted significances. Even Mimi had not her jewels and Lady Scotton had not Morte: she supposed, with the lift of her eyebrows which was her sign of resignation, that she must accept the vulgarity of such a reflection because of the consolation it gave her.

The morning had left a shadow of thought in her eyes, and when they went for a long motor drive, late in the afternoon, her responses to Irish's account of what he had been doing were absent and disconnected. He was as usual frankly full of himself, and she had to hear about his last trip to Paris, a few days before, and to give her attention as best she could to the description of some fifteenth century glass which he had run down. When he finally registered her mood she felt that his protest, if it were affectionate, was also characteristic. "But you're not depressed! Don't be depressed—it's so trying. And I've brought you another string of pearls from town—there! I'd meant to keep them for your birthday, but you shall have them now."

She turned with a quick sigh from her contemplation of the country which streamed past them. "Pearls! But it is barbarous, the quantity of pearls you give me. And how I love them! Is it a long string—yes? As long as the last? How delicious! *Voyons, mon ami*, I am not depressed, but I must talk business with you. I need some money—very, very much money; the house costs such a cruel sum!"

"Well, send me the bills or I'll make another deposit at your bank."

She had a touch of gaiety. "I do make the money go, don't I?"

"You do; the last was for—let me see!—furs, wasn't it?"

"But that was months ago. The last heavy expense was lace—the Mechlin."

"Oh, lace!" Irish smiled.

"And you yourself insisted I should buy it, so that was not my fault."

"No, my dear, no; of course not."

She was thoughtful for a moment and then she spoke abruptly. "Do you know that I have some money of my own?"

"Have you? Oh, yes—you told me. But that, my poor child, wouldn't be enough to keep you in cabs—if you went in cabs. Let's thank heaven you don't have to live on it!"

"But I did," she retorted; "I did live on it."

"When? How?"

"Before—at the time I left my husband and before we had decided on our legal separation."

"You lived on that money? You're joking!"

"I am absolutely serious. I lived on that money because I wanted to live on it. It was intolerable to me, just then, to take money from Paul."

"You mean to say that Cushing let you?"

"No, no, no. He wanted to give me anything, everything. It was I who would not accept."

"But he owed it to you."

"He owed me nothing greater than consideration; and I had put it to his consideration that I did not want to accept money from him just then."

"Oh, come! It's not a point of consideration. He owed you the support of a husband. You weren't legally

separated. To all intents and purposes you were still his wife. It was like starving you!"

She flushed deeply, under the influence of her agitation. With a glance at the roadside she saw, to her relief, that the motor had turned and that they were going in the direction of Morte. "Since it is a matter which is obviously difficult to discuss——"

"Oh, discuss it or not, as you please. All I say is that he owed you support and that you were wrong to refuse it. If it comes to that," Irish shrugged his shoulders, "I don't see why you haven't taken the settlement he offered you at the time of your divorce. I'm glad enough you don't need it. But considering there was no question of alimony, I don't see why you shouldn't have it. I'm sure the lawyers all pressed it on you, when the divorce went through."

"You believe I should be receiving money from him now?" she asked intently, with her eyes dark and bright.

"I don't see why not. You were his wife, weren't you? For that matter he owes you still—at this moment—more than I do, since our relation, in this stupid world, isn't legal; and heaven knows I'm glad enough to see you fling my money in the gutter."

"You really do not see the difference? You do not feel it?—why I could not take money from him, and now can take it from you?"

"No, I don't."

"Very good; neither," she said steadily, "did my husband understand it. But he understood enough to accept my wishes as his law."

Irish broke into impatience. "Well, you French aren't always so nice about what you accept and don't accept!"

"Do not debate that." She drew herself up. "Our shop keepers and our vulgarians may have the rights of cleverness. In my class we perform what we promise, we pay where we gain. And I—I respond to my own morality. I had left my husband because I could no longer be his wife. I had broken his family life and I had broken his relation with me. Since I refused to fulfil my part of the affair, it was intolerable to me that he should continue to support me. It is true. Yes, I did it; I lived on my own income. And now I fling your money in the gutter. Do I not give you exchange for it?"

"Talk exchange as much as you please, but I'm right."

"It is unfortunate, my dear, that you have not a juster view." She kept her voice clear and cold. "It is necessary to coarsen things a little in order that you may understand them. My husband had his faults, but he saw the spectacle of life—he felt things; and when he really felt he was aware of the finest of the fine."

"All the same he was a cad not to insist."

"He understood!" she broke out hotly. "He never argued, he only begged. He understood! It was between him and me. You will please not call him such names; you will please respect my former life!"

Irish recognised that it was one of her ways of making amends to him that she should wear all her pearls for dinner that evening. He had seen her more intimate and more winning, but never more enchanting. She seemed to him to have assumed the manner to correspond with her splendour. One of her most wonderful qualities, he thought, was that she could present herself as different so easily and—once their slight controversies were over—without any suggestion of moodiness or caprice. When

they returned to the library, after dinner, he was surprised to see her draw her chair to a lamp and begin to sew. As a child she had seen all the women of her family make things for their houses, she explained, and she had decided to make things for Morte. Irish had never seen her occupied with such tasks before. He noted the fact, with some astonishment, and the pathetic incongruity of the picture she made, leaning, in her magnificence, so earnestly over her work, and with his emerald flashing on her hand.

XXV

FRESNEUIL had not gone to Morte for two or three months. It was instinctive with him to avoid even the appearance of intrusion, and while Irish himself, confronted with the question, would have said that nothing but his own carelessness had made him omit to press his secretary to come down, now and then, for a week-end, Fresneuil had none the less drawn his own conclusions. Since his employer must have become more accustomed to his rare good fortune, it was natural that he should want to keep it more to himself. Perhaps, too, as Fresneuil imagined, he wanted to keep its inevitable uncertainties to himself. But it was not a situation to be less present in that one did not see its actual development; and it was with all the play of his interest that Fresneuil found himself, one November afternoon, face to face with the long house front between the grey trees, with its mellow tones even mellow in the soft autumn light. It drew between the converging aisles of

thin bare birches a line as beautiful as could be devised, rising at each end into fantastic stacks of chimneys. From the roof down to the rich designs which culminated in the central door it composed a deeply harmonious whole. He had felt when he first saw the house, at the time when he was hunting places in Irish's interest, how eminently it fitted Anne-Marie. Now, with all that might have happened in the passage of the months since he had seen her, he fancied that its air of old and profound secretiveness might have been enriched, in some unspoken way, by what she herself had experienced.

He learned at the door that she had just gone for her afternoon walk—not likely to take her far from the house that day, she had left word; and a footman guided him through the resounding corridors, still full of the lifeless scent of a house too long closed on its memories, and opened for him a side door which gave on the park. As Fresneuil left first the smaller garden and then the bowling green behind him the vista closed; and as soon as he had passed under the trees he saw that just below him there ran the little stream which made its way through the Morte woods, showing here and there a glint of water between the overhanging branches. He pushed on, instinctively aware that something in the temper of the day, with all the landscape grey under the threat of rain, would draw Anne-Marie here, where her thoughts could flow to the steady murmur of the water; and on a bench so placed that it faced a break in the woods and a glimpse of the long wide plain which rose into the nearest hills, he finally made her out. He had been right in expecting the evident pensiveness of her mood. With her head resting against the tree behind her and closely

huddled in her dark furs, she was lost in her thoughts. As he drew nearer, his quick perception saw the pathetic incongruity of her contrast with the bare scene; her lips were glaringly rouged, and a black satin slipper, with a disproportionately large buckle flashing on it, projected from beneath her dress.

She turned at the sound of his step, with the alertness of expectancy. Yet the quick smile with which she recognised him, as he emerged from the path, showed the faint relief of a person for whom a problem is temporarily postponed.

"Ah, monsieur, what a surprise!" she exclaimed, as she drew her hand from her muff. "And what a pleasure! I think you have not been to Morte since the early summer. How do you do?"

Fresneuil bowed over her hand, with more elaboration of courtesy than he usually permitted himself to show her. "Mr. Irish was quite helpless, madame. All morning there was a committee, until twelve, and some other engagements had to be disposed of—one of those situations beyond arrangement. There was nothing for it but that he should give it up; so I caught the twelve fifty from Waterloo——"

"That horrible train! But you have not lunched?"

"Yes—in a little basket, on the train. Thank you, but I had quite enough."

"You are sure?"

"*Mon Dieu*, madame, it was not food but it was sustenance. It did its best, and therefore I must dignify it as a meal. Thank you, nothing more."

Her eyes rested on him, full of the amusement with which her smile could light them, as if she recognised

in him that ease which was so like her own and which could make of banalities something gracefully philosophic. "Monsieur, we have infinite resignation, *nous autres français*. Do, I beg you, sit down." She moved along the bench to make room for him and then settled back, with a slight shiver, into the protection of her furs. "So! And in all these months during which we have not met, how has the world gone? Or has it perhaps stood still?"

Fresneuil could smile as delicately as she; he fingered his small moustache for a moment, looking at her with a deference which implied also a carefully modulated sense of their mutual comprehension. "Thank you, madame; we despoil Europe and all goes well."

"You've found lately——?"

His hands spread open in a gesture like her own. "Marvels; a Spanish altar piece, and some snuff boxes—exquisite specimens, with the best *Chinoiserie*. They are caught, landed."

"And they go to New York?"

"Yes."

"To be wondered at by the privileged few, the initiated?"

"I take it so."

"Ah," she had an abrupt change of tone, "what a country, that, for those poor treasures!"

Fresneuil was nothing short of the perfection of caution. "It is America who pays, who demands the best, who puts up the value."

"Value!" she exclaimed. "If I could express to you how value has come to fatigue me!" and she turned and fixed her eyes on the distant prospect and on the threatening clouds.

With her own look so averted Fresneuil could prolong the quick glance of curiosity he cast at her. He was wondering how far her former sense of their identity of standpoint still held. In the past months Irish's constant phrase, when they were together in town, had been: "You who know the reason for these unaccountable tastes, Fresneuil, do this and that for Madame du Chastel." Such an admission meant little more than one of Irish's usually vague recognitions. But Fresneuil had never ceased to wonder whether, if he himself had been at Morte, he would have caught again the half-unconscious query of the look Anne-Marie so often turned to him. He knew that such signs of uncertainty would betray no lessening of her happiness. Her regard for his opinion was one of the signs of her regard for all form. She was not the woman, he knew, to be so absorbed in her feeling that she did not want to see it properly conducted.

As she turned back to him, he could see that the obviousness of his interest arrested her attention.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "But I forgot it! I forgot to speak to you of your change in circumstances!"

"You are too good, madame."

"But yes, of course! Mr. Irish told me when he was last here; of your uncle's illness and death, and of your accession to his title and his estates." She bent her head. "For his death, monsieur, I offer you my condolences; for your own good fortune, my felicitations."

"Thank you, madame. I value both."

"It is still, as I understand, so very recent; you are still—" her glance took in the black fur collar of his black coat—"in the strictest mourning. But you have

made your plans? Your circumstances—they greatly change, do they not?”

“Happily they do. I am independent. I can fulfil my obligations to my family.”

“Ah, but what a vast happiness!”

“Vast indeed,” Fresneuil returned briefly. He put into the words all the accent which the repressing influences of his misfortune had taught him. “I can fancy nothing sadder than to have to occupy a position whose dignity one cannot maintain. Yes, I feel myself free. I shall even be able, in a *minuscule* way, to collect; not, you understand, the thousandth part of what Mr. Irish collects, but very humbly. There are some charming things in our home, in the Château de la Reveillière; I hope gradually to add to them.”

“Then you leave Mr. Irish?”

“I am now arranging his affairs, in preparation for my departure.”

Anne-Marie’s eyes lingered on his, as if to express all the friendliness of her interest. There seemed to her something peculiarly fitting in the restoration to his caste of a person who had come of her own distinguished world and whom circumstances had maltreated without ever debasing. She had never failed to notice the gallantry with which Fresneuil had carried the difficulties of his position, and that even in the face of Irish’s insistence he had contrived always to be an artist and never a menial. She mused for a moment, with her thoughts wandering vaguely back to the recollections of her childhood. As she fancied the life which would shortly reclaim her companion she seemed to see before her again half-forgotten customs and sentiments. She sighed

quickly. "And your family? Of whom does it now consist?"

"*Quant à ça*, there are so few of us left! My sister, two aunts, and my mother, whom I adore. Ah, madame, we are the only race aware of the fact that no tie is as important as the tie between mother and son; and now I can feel that we shall have our home together—that I shall repossess them all——"

She interposed with a quick gesture.

"After a life," she said, with a light scorn, "of excessive curiosities!"

Fresneuil's smile sympathised with her, but he shook his head as if to restrain her exaggeration. "I should have seen less of the world than I have, madame, if I did not recognise that I shall miss the excessive curiosities. No, but admit it! One loves to handle treasures, and I shall always have a little nostalgia for a Rubens here and a Goya there. These years with Mr. Irish would indeed have failed if I did not part from them with some regret."

She shook her head, thoughtfully. "That is not a philosophy—it is a resignation. Must we all come, *à la fin*, to resignation? In spite of all our gratitude for escape, in spite of all our violence of feeling, shall we always regret the Goyas and the treasures we must leave behind?" She clasped her hands suddenly. "But what a drama it is, after all! No, monsieur—you permit me to say it to you?—I rejoice infinitely in your good fortune. You have too much quality not to spend your life in living it. You must belong to yourself. Mr. Irish is so exquisite, so full of feeling, but he could not defend his things, poor dears, from that hideous America. Can I

express it? Sometimes I have felt that I wanted to go to the library, in New York, and set those imprisoned creatures free. I have felt an intolerable impulse to help them back to their own world——”

“You yourself, madame—you sometimes have this nostalgia?”

“Ah, if I have it——!” She was abruptly silent. As she closed her lips she was aware that her tone had admitted the depth of her distrust in her relationship with Irish, and that she had stirred the inner significance of things as the light cold wind stirred the leaves on the path. The uncertainties of the past weeks pressed suddenly upon her. In the relief of talking, however indirectly, with a person who had her own imagination and her own sympathies—and, beyond that, a person who was about to leave behind him the circumstances which still confronted her—her perplexities became acute. Was all the brilliancy of her feeling for Irish to fade into this longing to return once more to the restrictive and the conventional? At times she and he still had an absolute correspondence of feeling; but the old sureness of touch had gone in her at the moment when she had felt the first faint turn in the current of their enthusiasm. As the autumn had come she had had to admit that her hand shook a little in the manipulation of their meetings. She knew that her very doubts were nearer the truth than Irish’s decisive views. But her only way to meet the future, none the less, was to do nothing, and to absorb herself as usual in changing her dresses and in the rearrangement of her hair. To think of Fresneuil’s departure had given her a sense of the factitiousness of her connection here, with Morte and with Irish; and as her thoughts

rose and fell like the blowing leaves, she seemed to see the trend of all her life as ineffectual and misdirected. There had been too perfect a conjunction between her mood and Fresneuil's presence, and both he and she felt the directness of her comment upon her situation as she roused herself and spoke again, in French. "What a sad affair," her gesture amplified the words, "to have missed one's life!"

"But, madame, you who have lived so much——!"

"Ah, so much, perhaps, but not so well!"

"Could a woman of your taste, of your wit, have done it anything but well?" He allowed himself the dangerous ground. "And then you have lived such a beautiful thing!"

"*J'ai vécu une si belle chose!*" she repeated, and then, with an evident effort, she reverted to her clear English. "Ah, monsieur, it is not persons who cannot be replaced in life! After one has experience one knows that. It is the experience itself—*c'est la si belle chose, qu'on pleure.*" There was a sudden softness in her eyes. "*C'est l'amour de l'amour que nous n'oublions jamais.*" She rose and pointed to her wraps. "Come! Will you bring these? I can at least offer you an early tea, can I not?"

Fresneuil stood beside her, and he bowed in answer to her question. "Ah, madame, if you will give me the charity of tea——!"

Anne-Marie turned to lead the way up the little path. "Yes, we must have tea; and you will perhaps stop to dine with me. Who knows, when France recovers you, when we shall see you again!"

"*Enfin*, if I have your permission——"

"*Mais si, mais si.* You see there, between the trees—

that is Corfe, the most enchanting village in England. The castle you must know of; it is of a stupendous antiquity, I believe. There happens to be a Catholic church there, and I go over often. Lately, I must tell you," she turned towards him, "I have become more aware of the importance of my religious duties."

"Yes, madame? You have felt the necessity?"

Anne-Marie stroked her muff with her thin hand. "I have felt the necessity. You, I suppose, are *croyant*?"

"We are all the same, madame, are we not—*nous autres français*?"

Her smile came to answer his. "Ah, yes, you are right. It is a question of blood, of an attitude of race, is it not? Of course," her smile faded and her hand continued evenly to stroke her muff, "I have always accepted our faith as we all accept it. My parents would have seen to it that I accepted it more thoroughly, if they had lived. We are always logically Catholics, and I have always been Catholic in sentiment. But when I married—when I lived in America—I drifted away. I have been in these last years correct in my religious observances, but little more. And now that I find myself no longer too young and singularly alone, it was an advantage to my situation that—*enfin*, that I should cling to everything which would legalise me a little. It was an advantage that I should convey to Mr. Irish that I maintained a connection with at least some of my antecedents—that I had at least something to fall back on."

Fresneuil permitted himself a light amusement. "Ah, madame, *que vous êtes fine!*"

"Something," she said smiling, "which should make him at once a little jealous and a little secure. I have

frequently remarked that it annoys a man to have a woman totally dependent on him. There should be a moral reserve——”

“*Parfaitement!*” Fresneuil exclaimed. “*Mais parfaitement!*”

“In consequence I do my best; considering my situation, you understand, I do my best. Monsignor Lock, at Poole, is infinitely kind to me and also the dear nuns there. And kind in spite of their strict condemnation of my position. For that, I am the last to blame them.” She turned in the dim light beneath the trees. “Then to-day I cannot expect Mr. Irish?”

“I fear that for to-day it is impossible. In any case, you know, he was engaged to go to Branksome for to-night.”

“Ah, yes; to the Frames, the cousins. He is forever going there, is he not?”

“Yes—it is true; he is forever going there. I too have noticed it.”

Fresneuil answered as easily as she, and it was almost unconsciously that she found herself arrested by something in his tone. She paused and looked at him intently. “You, too, you say, have noticed it?”

“As much as one can ever be sure of noticing anything, with so elusive a person as Mr. Irish!” He smiled. “But it is true; lately his interests at Branksome do seem to have increased.”

“The family there—the cousins—there is a mother and two daughters, I think?”

“Yes. Mrs. Frame is a woman of distinction and charm. The younger daughter—ah, you have frequently

seen her; she is a type which endlessly repeats itself. The elder——”

“Dorothy, her name is?”

“Yes—that is she. She is more reserved; there is more in her to intrigue one. One cannot always tell, but I should say she had a definite will and definite desires.” He not only deliberately returned the directness of her look, but she had the odd sense that he waited long enough to be sure she registered it, before he again moved forward, beside her, up the path. “And I, madame, I have taken a liberty. I have brought you some of the newest books. When I was last in Paris I ventured to give myself the pleasure of remembering your tastes——” His light talk continued as they moved through the withered garden to the house.

XXVI

THE clear light of the next morning, after dull days, seemed to Anne-Marie to dissolve the disturbing world of uncertainties in which she had been living as it dissolved the autumnal mists. She woke with the sense that the sun, which pierced her window curtains and broke the spell of rain, was the hard light of fact and action.

Before her eyes were well open there was a loud knock at her door, and she heard her maid's voice saying that Mr. Irish had just arrived by motor, to breakfast. He had not much time, and he begged her to hurry—would she get up at once? There was not usually this perturbation on the however sudden occasions of his

coming, and as she hastily began to dress Anne-Marie fancied that her prescience had been correct and that some stir was afoot. Whatever it meant, she felt that a definite turn to their affairs would be as welcome as the sunshine; and that the day would bring this the tones of Irish's voice, which now drifted in to her, made doubly sure. He was evidently on the upper floor and going with the butler into the morning room, where they usually breakfasted; and as she listened she hastened the final touches she was giving her hair. She knew men's irritability, and this was not irritability but something deeper. "Madame du Chastel isn't dressed yet? But it's all hours—almost nine o'clock. Well, bring the coffee, then, and try to get me something that isn't muddy water. And I want the gardener to be at the east lodge at ten—ten precisely. I shan't have a minute to spare, and I can see him there as I go out. Ten, remember—don't get it wrong as you did last time. Whenever I come here I seem to find things inexcusably neglected. I can't understand it. Why more work isn't done, when the men appear to do nothing but stand around and waste time—come, you must look sharp about my coffee."

She was thus prepared for something new in him when, after her best effort at haste, she opened the door of the morning room and greeted him. Yet something in his attitude caught her up at once and astonished her beyond her expectation—not his ill temper, but his modulation of gesture and voice to a sudden and careful politeness.

"Well, my dear, I've routed you out of bed——"

"But not at all, Arthur, not at all. If only I had

known, if only I had been prepared, I could have saved you this delay. What a pleasure, to see you!"

"I was confoundedly sorry about yesterday. I hope it didn't put you out?"

"Mais du tout, du tout."

"It was absolutely impossible for me to come. I simply couldn't rescue the day; so Fresneuil said he'd run down and explain——"

"Ah, yes."

"Then I finished up in town——"

"And went to the Frames at Branksome for the night?"

"Yes, dined and slept; and as I most particularly wanted to see you, I thought the best way was to motor over for breakfast and for a little talk. I wish I had more time; but they're sending a horse and groom after me, as far as Wareham, and I'll pick them up there and ride the rest of the way back. There're to be some people for luncheon and I must be on hand—people I must see."

"Ah, yes," said Anne-Marie again. She was watching him for a sign which should place the reason for his odd manner. The servants closed the door and left them, and now, as he stood between her and the sunlight, at the other side of the laden breakfast table, her sense of something afoot deepened to a sharp anxiety. He was in riding clothes, which he always wore with the suggestion of discomfort of a man not temperamentally fitted to the saddle. At the moment they accentuated his awkwardness and whatever was his secret embarrassment. Her wit played upon it. The early morning did not suit him. Perhaps his unconscious conventionality

could not couple the ambiguities of their situation with this cheerful hour of talk and friendliness. He had always seemed to her most himself in the evening, in the special richness of the Stratton street house, sitting in the warm shadows of the library, with his eyes raised to one of his favorite pictures and his hand, with a trick of unoccupied men, vaguely fingering his moustache. What he had on his mind now absorbed him to the point of spoiling his usual flavour and the faint charm of his egotism. His scrupulous politeness—she had long since resigned herself to the unconscious rudenesses to which her position exposed her—struck her as more inexplicable than anything else; and she found herself suddenly regretting that she had not put on her simplest house dress rather than the bright morning gown she wore.

“*Bon!*” she said, with a gesture of decision. “We must eat. But sit down, my dear, I beg you. Coffee—you want coffee? But you have had coffee!”

“I was so hungry and you were so slow——”

“My poor angel! But I dressed in an instant—an incredible instant!”

“You mustn’t let me stop your breakfast, you know.”

“No, no; I cannot eat now. Let us talk, and I can breakfast later.”

“It’s true,” he said, glancing at his watch, “that I’ve only such a short time——”

“Good. We disregard breakfast, then; and now,” she put it with a smile, “what is it that you have to say to me?”

For the first time she perceived that he looked at her. She had seated herself on the arm of a low chair, and she was facing him with one of those mixed looks

which she knew so well how to compound of tenderness and amusement. She seemed to assure him that she was wise enough to disregard all annoyances and cross-purposes—that she knew him through and through, from his smallest foibles to those deep matters which she would never force him to explain. Bending a little towards him, she let her eyes and her attitude imply so thorough a knowledge of all his moods and necessities that he had only to trust everything to her.

She saw him register all this, and then she was aware that his look passed to her arms and her bare throat. "My dear," he said abruptly, "your *peignoir* is too much open at the neck!"

"*Tiens*," said Anne-Marie, "it is! You are right. Come, then; what is it you have to say to me?"

He studied her for a moment more. "Well, I've just this to say. I've come here to ask you once more to marry me."

The colour died in her face. Irish saw that even her lips whitened and that the look of clear fixity which marked her furthest verge of surprise came into her eyes. "But I do not quite understand—will you say it again?"

Irish lost his colour too, but he shrugged his shoulders with an effort at indifference.

"What's so remarkable? I've asked you, heaven knows, before this."

To give herself time she rose and stood by the mantel, with one foot on the fender, and took up a little bit of Lalique glass he had recently brought her. "When was the last time you asked me?" she said, after a moment's silence.

"When? Last spring—last winter, I suppose."

"Last winter," she corrected him, and then she raised her eyes from the vase she held. "The night you gave me my emerald."

"Of course," said Irish, "it was then. I remember now." If he had his concealments to make and she hers, he had to admit that her courage was flawless. Still white and with her hands still endeavouring to conceal some inner agitation—it was he who had once said, he recollected, that her hands were the most palpable expression of her feelings—she could yet retain not only the calmness which meant accurate judgment but she could give both herself and him the help of the bridge which her florid courtesy built across difficult moments. "It is good of you to do this. It is charming of you, and I greatly value it."

"Not at all, my dear; it's I who have so much to value in you."

"Mais non, mais non."

"I feel, you know, that you've so tremendously succeeded in all this—this business."

"No. On the contrary, the success has been yours. You were the one who, by your education, your customs, everything, was most open to mistakes, and you have avoided mistakes. I repeat, Arthur, that you have been charming." She watched his protesting shrug and the nervousness of the gesture with which he drew out a cigarette and lit it. "Tell me: you have felt our present situation could not go on?"

Her attention was so intently set on him that she caught the faint contraction of his brows before he said: "Yes, I've felt that."

"That it was just, let us say, neither to your happiness nor to mine?"

"Yes, exactly."

"In the past year—since we left America—you have been happy?"

It was odd that now he should redden a little. "Of course; I've been everything most happy."

"Everything most happy!" she repeated; and as he bent forward to throw the match with which he had lit his cigarette into the grate, he noticed that she drew sharply away from him. "So! and I too. I have been everything most happy."

"You're good to say so. But I've learned," he shook his head, "and it can't go on. It's right neither to your life nor, if one puts it so, to mine. I don't know, but I take it a man needs different things——"

"You mean that you are further on in the forties," she took him up, "and not so rash as you were."

Irish met her quick smile with his slower smile. "Oh, will any one ever understand me as well as you do, I wonder!" He appeared for a second to relax, and then he gave a quick sigh. "Well, there it is. I ask you again to marry me."

Anne-Marie looked around the room, at the streaming light of the rarely brilliant winter day, at the monstrous paradise birds on the chintz curtains, the comfortable breakfast equipment, and finally at the foot on the fender so near hers. Could she ever forget the smallest part of what framed the hour, she wondered, down to the smell of Irish's cigarette? In the face of all the secret information she was extracting from the talk and in view of the stakes it held for her, it was instinctive with her

to feel that the best way to keep hold of herself was to remain perceptive. There was a brightness in her eyes which might have come from sharply repressed tears. Yet the motion with which, after the lengthened pause, she replaced the little ornament upon the mantel was one of the clearest decision.

"You go now, then?"

"I ought to. It's a long ride, as I shall take it, and they lunch at one."

"Let me be quite clear; you go back to the Frames, at Branksome?"

"Yes."

"And pass to-night there?"

"Yes."

"And will not reach there much before one, for luncheon?"

"Exactly."

"*Bon.* You will have word from me there, within the next few hours."

"At Branksome?"

"Yes."

"You want, I fancy," said Irish, and he again reddened a little, "to think it over?"

"Of course; to think it over." Her look was as light as the tone in which she took up his question. "What would you have, my dear boy? I am thirty and these things count. Give me time."

He began to draw on his gloves. "You didn't want time before."

"Before? Ah, before I was so sure!"

"Aren't you sure now?"

The sparkle in her eyes grew more brilliant as she shook her head. "No; not now."

"Incalculable creature!" said Irish, laughing, and again his laugh was followed by a quick sigh. "Well——"

"Arthur!" she said impulsively, laying her hand on his arm. "Do not forget it: I thank you."

"Thank me? For wanting to marry you?"

"Yes," she said, with the slightest break in her voice. "Yes."

"Oh, come, my dear," he said, brushing her brow with his lips, "don't be hysterical. I'm sorry I scared you up so confoundedly early. Where's my crop? And that ass of a gardener—Knowles! Knowles, I say! Did you give the orders I told you to give?"

The bustle of his departure rose—it was significant, she had thought lately, that the irregularity of their relationship had lasted to the verge of regularity that now he always came and went with bustle. The butler appeared, hurried and anxious, a footman, the Morte chauffeur. Irish gave his instructions and made his complaints, as he descended the stairs. In the lower hall he turned and looked up to where Anne-Marie leaned upon the banisters. "Good-bye, then. Forgive me for troubling you."

"Good-bye."

"During to-day I shall hear?"

"During to-day." In the gay blue and gold of her *peignoir* she looked like some tropical bird, lit for a moment on the sombre staircase. She waved her hand gaily. "During to-day, I promise."

"Go back to bed, my dear, and get some sleep." He waved back at her and passed out of sight. The ser-

vants followed him, and through the open door she heard the noise of the motor. Her body stiffened, as if it braced to meet a moment of pain, and she heard his voice again, calling sharply.

"Anne-Marie, Anne-Marie!"

"Yes?"

"Will you see Foster and tell him that there's a leak in the garage roof?"

"Yes—what?"

"In the garage roof; there must be a leak. The top of your landaulet is being rotted through by dripping water."

"Ah, is it!"

"He must see to it, and at once. What's an agent for? I hate to bother you with it—do forgive me—but I haven't the time. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she called; the door closed, she could hear the motor start, and it seemed to her that silence suddenly redescended upon Morte.

XXVII

ANNE-MARIE had her first uncertainty when, on the afternoon of the same day, she found herself standing in one of the closed rooms of Irish's London house.

Throughout the hastened action of the day she had had the clearest vision and the most complete lack of any obscurity in her purpose. Even when she had gone back and shut herself in the breakfast room, with the pleasant warmth of the sun illuminating its gay comfort

and Irish's cigarette still smoking in the grate, she had not hesitated as to what her plan must be or distrusted her capacity to carry it out. She could close her eyes and see the picture she must have presented in the brilliant silks of her gown, against the background of the chintzes whose figures were like fantastic embodiments of her hurrying thoughts. It had seemed to her then that the danger she confronted lay before her like an actual declivity. It was so much the more acute in that what she risked was the possibility of her own failure to meet the situation rather than of Irish's. She was keenly conscious of the exactions of her breeding and of the necessity to maintain intact, at any cost, the high tone of the life they had led together. Since she had been frankly aware of the instability of such a position as she occupied, it was only proper that she should accept the consequences, since they had turned against her. This was her nearest approach to any consciousness of the moral demands of the situation. The various contacts of her experience had at least taught her, she thought, that there was a high attitude of which one did not permit one's self to let go.

Phrases of the letter she had written to Irish had kept repeating themselves to her all day. She wondered, indeed, if she could ever reach any insensibility which would allow her to forget them and whether they must not always remain as intimately in her memory as the close scent of the Stratton street rooms. "I must go. . . ." That appeared to be the refrain of what she had said, as if that alone mattered; then, "Why should one complain of destiny?" "In those beautiful days which I shall cherish as long as I live." "I have under-

stood the truth. You love some one else, you want to marry, to establish yourself; you want to be free; you have the right to be free. And as long as I am here you are not free. So I must go." It was at this point that she had held her pen for a moment. She knew the evanescence of even the comfortable sentiment Irish would drift into, and that in marriage as in his relation with her the one thing of which he was supremely incapable was any real power of sustension. It was the honest deduction of her experience that no one but she could continue even partially to make him happy, and that if she needed him it was no less true that he needed her. But she had ended by shaking her head at her own sophistry. She knew she was not a person to better her own situation by his ill-judgment, and she had steadily continued: "To-day you made the most beautiful *geste* of your life. Nothing could have been more beautiful than your desire to do your best for me. But there was a difference between the offer you made me to-day, and the offers you made me before; that difference is the months we have passed together. . . . I do not want to wait for our love to die. . . . I must go, and I must go while I suffer and while you suffer—for I know that you will suffer. But you will understand, as I do, that it was the penalty of our love that it had to be brief."

It had been as she signed the sheet and sealed it that her thoughts had taken a sudden irrelevant turn and that she had found herself back again at the night when she had told her husband that she meant to leave him. The scene rose before her with the vividness of a vision. She could see the circles of light which the lamps on

Cushing's desk made in the brown shadows of the library, the suspense which had seemed almost visibly to hang in the air, the way Cushing's hands had clasped the back of the chair on which he leant as he confronted her. Beyond the fact of the immediacy of her loss—beyond the actual suffering which, as her mind became clearer, grew more and more penetrative—it seemed to her that she could foresee that her marriage and her relation with Irish would one day assume for her the impersonal resemblance of all great experiences. Granting the proportionate concentration of feeling, they had lasted an equal time and given her a more or less equal return. But what made their real identity was the fact that Cushing and Irish, in their diverse ways, had tried to do their best for her. The instinct to make amends to a woman was radical in them both. She could even trace a likeness between them—it drew from her a faint smile—in the fact that they would both vaguely have resented her capacity to compare such intimate personal adjustments impersonally. So far as her own adjustments went, she troubled no more about her inner processes than she had troubled when she left her husband. Several times, during the last hours, she had repeated to herself the kind of phrase she had so often heard Cushing use: "If things don't last—why, it makes all the poetry of living that they don't last." Her dependence on him had been instinctive enough to make her recall his view at such a time. It meant to her little more than a vague formula, and her attention had wandered from it to her vagrant curiosity as to who would next wear Irish's pearls. Yet her sense of drama helped her where her sense of the imaginative failed, and the

weight of her impending loneliness, pressing momentarily closer, was held a little at bay by the vast riddle of the inequities of life.

She did not know how the rest of the morning had passed, but she was somehow aware that she had managed its difficulties well. There was fortunately little time—she meant to catch the one o'clock express—and she had to make her arrangements so hurriedly that the household had no leisure to indulge its astonishment. Her only explanation of her sudden departure, without a maid and with so little luggage, was the bare statement that she had been called away, that she would be gone indefinitely, and that everything was to be guarded in Mr. Irish's interest. He would probably be there himself in a day or two—there was a letter which would explain her plans to him and which the motor, after leaving her at her train, was to take over to Branksome.

Her purpose was not so much to silence comment as to declare her plans so definitely that she was committed, beyond any weakness of her will, not to return. She recollected that it was one of the penalties of her position that she should have to relinquish it with a lack of frankness, and this was not the way in which she would have chosen to part from Morte. Her last quick look at the house, as it faced the noon sunshine with all its old impenetrability and before the bare trees enclosed it from her view, had tried to convey something of her regret. If in human relations there were a special set of senses which instructed when a situation should begin, it seemed to her that the finer apprehension recognised the note of ending, the turning current and the fading light, and that she would always owe Morte a

debt for not lowering in her a sense of fitness as scrupulous as its own.

When she reached London she had driven at once to Stratton street. The house was in the hands of caretakers, since Irish had been there rarely of late, and as she ran no risk of meeting him she had yielded to her imperative desire to see it again. She had set herself to make the pilgrimage from room to room, in the wan light which penetrated the shuttered windows; and it was now that her pain overcame her with the reality of the physical. In the midst of what so intimately evoked their happiness she felt how rare and brilliant it had been, how full of fortunate accidents and lovely moments. Her clear eyes, passing around the silenced rooms and the shrouded furniture, recognised the closest touch of her grief: what she had to uproot was not only a feeling but a habit. She had trained and shaped her very thoughts to responses which would no longer be required of them. The loss of Irish's demands on her seemed to her to penetrate her more profoundly than the loss of her demands on him. The dimmed reflections of the polished floors, the dry, close air of Irish's library, where she had been accustomed to see so much warmth and light, the stillness in her own rooms—a stillness which was not enriched and suggestive, as it had been, but which verged on vacuity—reminded her of the finality of her act. It struck her as indescribably strange that, with the slightest quiver of her resolution, she could infuse it all with life and make it bloom again. If she telegraphed Irish two words, or if she merely turned and crossed the hall to where the telephone stood, she could transform the silence of the house into activity.

The sense of her power was what gave the subtlest forms to her nascent jealousy. She was too honest not to admit the temporary nature of the influence she still retained. If she sent Irish a message to come instantly and to receive from her personally the news that she had capitulated and changed her mind, he would of course come. But she knew at the cost of how much strain to a bond which had not been made to bear strain. It was Miss Frame who would now have, as she plainly saw, the privilege as well as the penalty of creating a relation which could withstand tests, and who would have all the presuppositions of orthodoxy to help her. As she fingered the little objects which had been left on her writing table and, in her passage from one room to another, stirred the hangings whose old blue folds seemed to have retained some faint aroma of all that had made her life here so happy, she wondered if it were not the malignity of fate that a result which had cost her such care and such control should be achieved by another woman with ease, simply because she would be Irish's wife. She had never been jealous of his former feeling for Geraldine Herring. Her own adroitness could easily discount the surviving traces of such an influence. But the throng of uncertainties and premonitions which now beset her touched her intimately. She felt now not so much that the woman Irish married would fail—that she would be unable to keep up forms of response which could meet such elusive demands as his—but that, with his settling into middle-age, she could not well avoid success.

She found herself wishing for some of the obtuseness of such sentimentality as Mrs. Sale's. It would have been a consolation to believe either that she was injured

or that she had the factitious comforts of a voluntary renouncement. Edith could always have found a motive for the disaster—she smiled ironically at the idea. She herself had to admit that the sequence of such events was the result of the gradual development and rearrangement of passing time. The growth of her restlessness had not obscured the fact that her feeling for Irish was still profound. She had recognised in their difficulties the inevitable friction which rose in such cases; and as she debated and argued with herself, moved more powerfully than any external circumstances could have moved her by the recollections around her, she felt all the vitality which still existed in their relation. It would have been less than Irish deserved, she had told herself, if she could have followed her purpose of leaving him entirely without weakness.

The faint reflection of the street lamps through the closed blinds showed her, when she finally roused herself, that it was already late. She had left her luggage at the station, and she had already bought her ticket for an evening train to Southampton which connected with the midnight boat to Havre. There was nothing for her to do in the interval but stop at some hotel and dine. But she felt that she could no longer stay in the house without exciting suspicion, and she was just descending the lower stairs when a sharp ring at the street bell made her pause. The servant in charge had evidently been standing at the entrance, to let her out, for before she could draw back the door was opened and Fresneuil confronted her.

He signed to the man to leave them and then, in the

light which shone dimly through the wide hall, he looked up to where she stood.

"I can be of no service to you, madame?" The formality of the words was oddly at variance with the strain of his tone and with his repressed animation.

Anne-Marie had thrown back her veil, and though she was aware that the signs of her tears still showed she kept her look clear and steady. "Thank you, I need nothing," she answered briefly.

"I have just reached town," he pursued, "and I thought—I felt that perhaps——"

He caught in her eyes a flash of fear that he had come from Irish. "No, there is nothing you can do for me—nothing. I have decided to go away—I am leaving England to-night," she explained more hurriedly.

Fresneuil continued to search her face. "You're going! Ah, I thought so!"

She descended the few steps which separated them, with a vague feeling that she must get out of the house before he said anything more. What was intolerable to her was that he had come on any errand which interposed between herself and her decision, and that Irish should by any means try to plead with her or to interfere with her.

"I do not know what Mr. Irish can have told you——" she began, and then she paused before the evident sincerity of his surprise. "But I've not seen Mr. Irish since early this morning."

"This morning?"

"Last night I found he had wired me in care of the station master at Corfe. They gave me the message while I was waiting for my train—after I had dined with

you. He wanted me to be at Branksome very early to-day, as early as possible. So I drove over—it was then very late—and slept at the village inn there and saw him this morning; before”—his look deepened—“before he saw you.”

“Then why——?” she asked.

She had never seen his calmness more nearly desert him; he laid his hands on the carved railing which separated them and bent nearer to her. “Ah, madame, you will not rebuke me, but in the last hours I have so deeply felt——”

“What did Mr. Irish tell you?”

“Nothing; nothing but the fact that he hoped that it might be possible you would consent—You see, there were arrangements to be made; and, if you permit the term, as your friend and his——”

She raised her head. “But I have not consented.”

Fresneuil answered instantly. “I knew it; I knew you would not; so I went back to Morte just after luncheon, and when I found you gone, then I understood. You are sure, madame, that there is no way in which I can serve you?”

Her astonishment arrested her for an instant. “You knew I would not consent? What do you mean?”

“I knew it,” he repeated firmly. “Ah, don’t you see that, knowing you, it was impossible not to know it?”

Anne-Marie continued to hesitate, with her eyes fixed on his. “Then you came, yesterday, to warn me? Was that it?”

He coloured faintly and she saw that the delicate sensitiveness of his face stiffened slightly. “You did not need warning.”

"Ah, did I not!" She clasped her hands and she felt her voice tremble. "Does one not long for just a moment of respite—just a second—before the stroke of fate falls?"

"You did not need warning," Fresneuil reiterated. "If I had doubted it, it was you yourself who showed me the answer. No, I had nothing definite in mind; I wanted only to see if you were ready—do you understand?—to see if your sense of proportion and your fineness, whatever might occur, were there to support you." He waited. "And you are sure there is no way in which I can be of use to you? You would command me—you will always command me?" He gave her a last eager look and then drew aside to let her pass. "There is nothing for me to do, then, but to leave you."

Anne-Marie's head had bent in acquiescence. She faltered for a moment more, and then, with an impulsive motion, she held out her hand. "But you must understand that I thank you, monsieur. You have shown me a great consideration."

XXVIII

IT had appeared to Cushing to be the only legacy of his old enthusiasms that he should continue to mark the contrast between them and the even lines into which his life had fallen. In his moments of meditation he found that his thoughts constantly reverted to the opposition between the present and the things which had happened a year and a half ago. The gap be-

tween his hopes and their fulfilment had been so wide that his irony at first forced him to classify his marriage as one of the brief lapses from the laws of conventionality of a young and unformed man. He had noted, with some amusement, that his immediate reaction, in the first months, had made him go back to something like the localised prejudice against everything foreign which must have existed in his parents' generation. But as time and distance brought it all into better proportion, his justice reminded him that the greatest element of reproach in his marriage had after all been to that ill-judgment which had led him to attempt it.

What had at first seemed to him insuperably strange was his consciousness that so far as Anne-Marie's feeling went their divorce had scarcely registered. He could close his eyes and hear her say that one couldn't divorce people so little married, that their marriage had never been marriage in the French moral and social acceptance of the term, and that though she knew that what had happened was an outrage of good tone, it was unfortunately necessary. Once she accepted a condition, he remembered that it was her philosophy to abide by it. She had had her own reasons for abandoning the privileges of decency, and he never for a moment fancied her as underrating the cost. He knew, on the contrary, that she must have definitely computed and accepted it. But it had been the most intimate of his difficulties both that he could not rid himself of his curiosity as to her motives for such an action and that his own experience with her so plainly proved the answer. She would have sacrificed what she considered so important only in order to contribute to the success of

her relation with Irish; and this was a constant reminder of what the extent of her happiness must be.

The fact that he had none to compare with it had more than ever determined Cushing to accept the full stigma of the situation. At every turn his pride had been more subtly wounded, and he was at last aware of a permanent dulness of feeling and of the darkening of his face to the expression of suppressed pain. His vanity was too much of type and too little personal to react and re-enforce him in a more comforting view of his position. For some time he had surrendered himself to a suffering which it seemed to him that his loyalty to his deepest feelings forbade him to ignore. By degrees his impeccability of attitude grew less strained and his opinions less sharp, and he realised that his natural indifference reasserted itself. If he had not Anne-Marie's frank acceptance of what had happened, he was none the less influenced by the fact that their marriage had been somewhat out of the usual course of events and that its failure was therefore more nearly explicable. In the last analysis, he thought, they had always had these surprising correspondences of conclusion. What she reached by quick agility of reasoning, he reached later and by the profounder method of travelling distances whose painful length was beyond illusion.

Yet he had the persistent sense, accentuated by the rumours he heard or by the stray notices of Irish's movements in the newspapers, that Anne-Marie was managing both her difficulties and her disgrace well. One might have known, as he reflected, that she could be trusted to conduct her downfall as properly as possible. But it was undeniably creditable that the only scandal in

her living with Irish appeared to be in the fact that she admitted she did it. He had known women who had done the same thing, but who had done it either with vulgarity or with a belief in the invalidity of usual customs which made the step hardly more than theoretical. He had had reports, through the medium of his sister, from people who had come across Irish and Anne-Marie in London, people who had passed them in the crowd after a play or who had seen them across a restaurant. Even to observation which could not see her subtleties as he saw them, she had appeared perfect, neither pushing nor unduly evasive but with her dignity as simple as if she had never lost it. It was above all this evident directness in her acceptance which held Cushing's attention and which so often occupied his thoughts. Part of the very elaboration of her power to affect him lay in the fact that when he heard of the slightest incident concerning her his imagination could amplify it with countless meanings; though all the while the hard tests of his experience reminded him of the vacuity of her inner feeling.

In his own life he had resumed the habits and tastes of freedom. He was closely absorbed in his profession, and he had already the nascent sense that he had created for himself a place which was more definite than the place of the average successful man and that he could see before him the chances of a wide career. He had been conscious that his reversion to the practical issues had not only been because of instinctive defence against any admission of his own difficulties. Such a reversion was in itself instinctive, with a man of his traditions. The private feelings of the men with whom he

was constantly in contact were either so accepted as to be a foregone conclusion, or so submerged that he sometimes wondered, in contrast, how he himself had been so deeply affected. He had had to make definite and profound readjustments, of nature as well as of external circumstances. It was the result of them that he had allowed his professional interests to take possession of him, and he began to feel already the satisfaction of the man who is listened to with a certain attention and who has arrived at a certain definite accomplishment.

But to this very fact of the intactness of his own life he constantly opposed Anne-Marie's present situation. The central fact of what she had done made any comment futile. He knew too well that in the vast sea in which she had sunk one could not look for wreckage. Yet his inner knowledge still reminded him of many ways in which she might suffer. It was part of the paradox of their relation that their break had been complete enough for him to feel himself justified in thinking of her. Negative as they seemed, his memories never let him forget that even their unhappiness had been so poignant that it was still constantly present—that she had shown him so wide an expanse of life that he still continued, to some extent, to live by it.

He had not yet risen from his dinner when, one evening in late March, his sister's name was announced. It was rare for her to come to him, and Cushing at once divined something unusual in her manner and her air as she took her seat beside him and pushed away the fruit he had put in front of her. When the servants had gone she bent across the table towards him. "I've

come in to see you because of a piece of news I've just heard. They say it's positively announced that Arthur Irish is to marry—to marry his distant cousin, Miss Frame."

"Well, you're surprised?" he heard himself ask.

"Oh, of course, there have been warnings that something was afoot. It has seemed strange—all one's heard lately; his going off to Venice alone, in the late autumn, and then his going on alone to Egypt. But this is positive. I suppose it means—I can't quite see what it means."

Cushing smiled as he continued to peel his fruit. "Nor I."

"At least it means a break between him and—well, his present life. One can't conceive how Miss Frame or her family, with all the scandal there's been, will tolerate——"

"My dear Edith, we're neither Miss Frame nor Miss Frame's people. They'll clear up, no doubt, so cloudy a situation."

Mrs. Sale reddened. "Yes; but Anne-Marie——"

"I've nothing further to do or say about that."

"But remember that she might very well turn up here again. What's to become of her?" She looked at him anxiously, evidently driven by her desire to have him declare where he stood. "Remember that she's still so young!"

"Not so young that she didn't very definitely know her own mind and follow it."

"But now who knows what may happen?"

"But, my dear, I do," said Cushing. "She'll go her own way and make her own life."

"But don't we owe her at least something? Not by her computation, of course—that takes into account merely the exigencies of justice, and let's hope we're decent enough to be something better than merely just. By our computation, isn't there still some room for generosity? Ah, it's not easy for me to grant it, but isn't there? She's so alone and she's so without resources. I know—you told me, you remember—that no payment, no money, passes between you. Well, then——"

Cushing shook his head. "You've worked up the kind of case I should have worked up myself, a year or so ago. But it's not necessary to work up anything. You'll have to take my word for it. You were kindness itself when it was right to be kind. But it's all long since closed. I can only repeat it—I know what will happen. We shan't see Anne-Marie and we shan't hear from her." His smile deepened and then wavered. "She's immoral, if you please, but in such things she's not indelicate."

His sister watched him for a moment. The puzzled intensity behind the affectionate concern in her face caught and held his attention. He was not so much surprised at Mrs. Sale's being unable to dispel the shadow of his evident recollections or at her sense that Anne-Marie should have left behind her, after such a disgrace, such tenuous threads of influence. His surprise was rather at himself. In the last months he had neither made a point of talking of his wife nor of pointedly avoiding the mention of her name. Yet any news of her brought back a vivid sense of her implication in all his feelings. It brought, too, the recollection of her astounding in-

genuity, and of the indecencies in her careful decency; and he found his thoughts following the clue of what compact of deceit she might still make with Irish, or perhaps with some one else.

He pushed his chair away from the table. "Sometimes I feel you worry about me; my dear girl, you mustn't worry. I've told you—I need a holiday. I shall sail in a week or so, and spend a month in Paris. There are some matters of Miss Morrow's estate which must be disentangled, and I can attend to them; I've put them off inexcusably. Will that satisfy you?"

Mrs. Sale continued to look at him searchingly. "Ah, you always satisfy me. But at times I wonder—you'll forgive my saying so?—just what Anne-Marie left behind her. You know," her light flush showed again, "she left something."

"Know! Of course I know—who should know better? Do you think an influence like hers is so vague," he felt the sarcasm in the question, "that one's not conscious of it? But that's just the difficulty; it's there, and yet it's so fundamentally, so hopelessly, vague."

Mrs. Sale hesitated again and then bent over to lay a persuasive hand on his arm. "Do you know what I'd do, if I were you? I'd marry. Dear Paul, why don't you?"

Cushing's smile returned—less, as he thought, because of the idea than because of the strange sound it assumed when it was put into words. Yet as he gave his sister back her glance it struck him how perfect her forbearance from any interference or coercion had all along been, and he laid his hand affectionately over hers. "You've been so good not to mind that I did things

in my own set way—never to bother me or to let me see that you were bothered. But why should I marry?”

“And why shouldn’t you? You’ve every right to marry. I myself, I feel that it’s a mistake to lose one’s chance. If I were younger—or if I’d been younger when things went to pieces in my own life—I should have acted differently.”

“Should you?” The connection between her case, so simple and obvious, and the delicate phases of his own had never seemed to him less direct. “Well, yet you can’t blame me. You’ve made your life active and interesting, and I’m trying to do the same with mine.”

“Active and interesting! Yes!” Mrs. Sale seemed to pause before the opposition of her tenets and her personal feelings. “But with you men it’s different. They say that if a woman has her duty and a dream she has enough.”

Cushing was looking in front of him as she spoke, at the empty chair opposite his. For a second his sense of how his wife would have met the expression of such a sentiment was so vivid that he could almost hear her say: “Do you think so?” and see the amused lift of her eyebrows before they dropped again to their careful conventionality.

He rose abruptly, and turning towards the window behind him he pushed back the curtains and raised his eyes to the scattered points of light which, above the vast shimmer of the lights of the city, shone dimly in a dark and windy sky. “Well, it’s hopeless. There’s everything to prevent my marrying again.”

“But is there nothing for it? Isn’t there, as a matter of fact, everything for it? Isn’t there—let’s say so

frankly—Geraldine? You say you'll run over to Paris for the spring; see her, and try! You know as well as I why she left me, at the time of your divorce, and why she's preferred to live abroad. She's got her ways of being delicate, as well as Anne-Marie. No——" she caught the meaning of his uncertain gesture. "I don't care what may or may not have happened. Surely with the confidence and companionship which so plainly exist between you, there's no reason why you shouldn't marry——" She broke off again, and then, seeing the gradual astonishment of the look he turned to her, she added: "But *is* there a reason?"

Cushing again held his reply. He was conscious of his sense of the difficulty of answering her—and with her all the former points of view in himself which she represented—with anything approaching the truth of what he felt. He was scarcely less surprised by her suggestion than by his own instinctive revulsion.

"No, I can't say there's any reason," he finally brought out. "Any reason one could call reasonable, that is."

"Then that proves my point. If there's nothing against it, there's everything for it."

"Everything—yes;" he still kept his smile, which seemed less a play of his features than an expression of his thoughts. "But don't you see that everything isn't what one wants? One wants the thing that's special—that's inimitable."

"It hasn't anything to do with Anne-Marie?"

"My dear girl, do you think you're quite sensible?"

Mrs. Sale's voice warmed in her earnestness. "It can't have anything to do with Anne-Marie! She can't have spoilt things for you so successfully as that! You know

that I myself would give her any and every charity. No, she was too abominable!"

"Come, my dear!" Cushing interposed. "You're imagining like a school-girl, and it's not like you. Of course it's not got anything to do with Anne-Marie. But you don't seem to see that it has got to do with"—he searched for a term—"with what she made happen to me. That's the difference. It's got to do with the past."

"Then Anne-Marie," she kept to her point, "isn't what interferes?"

"No, of course not."

"Yet mustn't one just believe that things go on—that life goes on?"

"Yes; it's only a question," he retorted, "of how one advances or retards them. They don't always go on best in remarriage. There are ways of spoiling everything that one's done. There are concessions, there are cheapnesses of repetition, which aren't going on at all—which are lamentably going back!"

"Then you've felt all along that it was impossible for you to marry any one?"

"I don't know that I have, but when you face me with it, I think so."

"Oh, come, Paul! You're not logical!"

"That's it—of course I'm not. Logic isn't what counts; life itself isn't logical. It's not logical for me to feel I can't be affected, as I was once affected, again. It's not logical that I shouldn't want to be so affected again." He faced the open window, with a suppressed impatience. "It's a case of the paralysis of life—of the inhibitions with which all we've thought and felt sur-

round us. That impossible feeling—that's what interferes, if you'll believe me!"

XXIX

A FORTNIGHT later Cushing stood, one afternoon, and looked over the fall of the S. Cloud terraces to the outstretched view of Paris.

It had been a mild spring day, with such blue and mauve tints running through the misty sunshine that the woods behind and the long allées opening to the sky had caught and kept the *brume*, and the light hung like folds of gauze between the trees. In the faint golden radiance in front of him the city lay impalpably, more like an accretion of sun and mist than the actualities of stone. He had often climbed to the topmost terrace to look at it, across the shining band of the river and the tree tops whose height appeared to have been so beautifully and carefully graduated to serve as a middle distance. But this afternoon the sight seemed to have for him a significance which stirred amongst his memories like a faint breath of air stirring amongst dry leaves.

Since his arrival, a few days before, he had been gradually and increasingly conscious that there was this strange elision between the city and his thoughts. At first, indeed, on the morning when the boat train passed through the crowded grimy buildings of the *banlieue* and between the high discoloured walls which led to the S. Lazare station, he had felt an instinctive regret at his return and at the fact that the propinquities of Paris must

bring before him so many things which he preferred to forget. It had not been until his ear grew accustomed once more to the French sounds and his visual angle shifted to something at least outwardly like their visual angle that he was reminded of all that he and these people had in common. He had had to smile to himself as he made the admission that his old distrust of their speciousness was always present. Yet the colours along the meticulous garden walks, the cries of the children as they played, the way the sun slanted down the streets, on the warm, brilliant afternoons, the high note at the end of a sentence, instead of the customary Anglo-Saxon drop, woke longer and longer reverberations in his thoughts. It was not their charm alone which was involved. He had learned its turns and twists too well to think it more than a delightful finish. What had touched him most nearly, as each day revived its sense more intimately for him, was that to place this word and that gesture should be a reminder not only of his initiation into their meaning but of the deepest circumstances of his own life.

The evening before his restlessness had overcome him in a sudden desire to be alone. He had had an engagement to meet some of his compatriots for dinner and to go on to the play. But as he dressed his feeling was so vivid that he decided to yield to it. He despatched a messenger with an apology and with the plea that he wasn't in the mood for the Français and classicism, and after he had dined he wandered out, with no direction to his thoughts, through the tortuous side streets and into the central glare of the boulevard. Some distance down its brilliant length, and a little out of the

press of his own country people, he had found a small café and seated himself at a table under the extended awning. There was something of the real Paris here. The company around him and the waiters who pushed at his elbow had less the effects of wares arranged to tempt the foreigner's enthusiasm; and as he sipped his coffee and glanced up, through the blaze of light overhead, to the sky which shone dimly between the interwoven branches, he had said to himself that for the first time the very night seemed real and less one of those stage settings for which the city was so remarkable.

He realised, now that he had accomplished it, that this escape from the Paris of tourists was what he had wanted. In the last days, while he had walked in it, shopped in it and seen its pictures, he had felt the sharp division between himself and the transients for whom the information of Paris had a merely intellectual value. Something in the restless shifting of the throng on the pavements and in the looks and gestures in which he could see such numerous implications, affected him to the point of making him look around half expectantly, with an odd impression of his wife's actual presence. He had often had the illusion before and he had always met it with a shrewd distrust of his own fatuousness. But he asked himself now if it were not the cleverest of all her ways that, across any time and any circumstances, she never permitted one's sense of her presence to lapse. In surroundings like these, it was part of her penetrative charm that she could contrive to remain and to hold his thoughts as closely as she had held his eyes, when she came into a room, set on the lights and changes

of her face. It was the same trick by which she had made even her name seem so alive with her particular quality. Cushing found himself repeating it—Anne-Marie—Christiane—Clémentine—de Maupertuis du Chastel; and it seemed like a response to the dim evocation of her that he wondered, more intimately and presently than he had allowed himself to wonder before, what the past months must actually have meant to her.

It was another of the ironic contrasts between them that he could still, even across her intervening experiences, feel sure of a knowledge of her which Irish, with his superficial capacities, could never have acquired. He could even admit in how many ways she must have taught Irish to love her, with all her arts to help her and with the added balance of that stoical acceptance of which she was at times capable. But he could also see the deeper result. Her slower motions, an accentuation of the little line of hardness at the corner of her mouth and the habit of silences into which she must have fallen, would all show the constant struggle which had taken place between her emotion and her reason. But she was the kind of person who left one wondering, against all proof, if she really could have changed; and Cushing was conscious, beneath his intellectual disbelief, of an instinctive confidence that to-day she could be no other than the Anne-Marie who had her same little vanities and coquetries and her strange mixture of reason and unreason, and who would have kept the fresh youth he had loved through all the inequities of her fortunes.

He knew what the very illusion of her which he had conjured up would reply, with the shrug of resignation which he could see so vividly. Of course she had changed.

Life could not be lived at such a rate without bending and subduing what had been such a proud erectness of character. He supposed he must admit that there could be left in her few of the things for which he had most tenderly cared. But he had had a sense of secret pleasure that, even in this dim way, she had risen so actually in his thoughts. There was only one question of importance, his memories of her had reminded him: whatever had happened, they had still the bond of having had together the best kind of happiness living could give. He had felt his romantic sense glow with life at the touch; not, he knew, because he had any hope for a different future, but because of his recognition that he had lost with her all that made the poetry of living and that what remained was not a question of possibilities but of concessions.

His glance had dropped from the distant view to the nearer perspective, and he saw that a pink parasol he had been half conscious of watching had moved away from a knot of equally bright hues, gathered against the balustrade of the widest and lowest terrace, and that its owner was slowly beginning to mount the long flights of steps which led to where he stood.

The sight gave a different turn to Cushing's reflections. A day or so after his arrival he had gone to see Mrs. Herring, to deliver the various messages with which his sister had charged him. He had found her established in a large *premier*, in a quarter whose newness and brightness called up in his mind, by the force of contrast, the dim old gravity of the rue de Bellechasse. When he stood face to face with her again, the sense

of a slight strain which he had expected both in her and in himself seemed to him surprisingly lacking. Since her departure from America, the year before, his thoughts of her had kept the tinge of feeling of their talk in his sister's apartment. His impulses of sympathy for her had been at that time too deeply stirred for him to take account of anything else. But it was perhaps inevitable, he supposed, as he now confronted her again, in her erratic black and white drawing room, that the lapse of time should have worked insensibly on them both. Her greeting to him had the savour of the society to which she was now accustomed—one composed, as he had drily observed, of the remnants of international divorces. As he listened to her sharp talk, he had even had the sense that if he looked back closely enough he could discover unrealities in the confession she had made to him. She had explained that she was exceedingly busy, since it was the beginning of a gay season. Between dinners and tea parties, between polo and the races, he had felt not only that she was in her element, but that he definitely preferred it not to be his. But that morning she had telephoned him to say, in a quieter tone, that she unexpectedly had the afternoon free and that if he, too, could arrange his engagements they might go off to S. Cloud for a talk and for tea.

When he stopped for her at her flat, soon after luncheon, she had refused his suggestion of driving out by motor, and she had insisted, instead, that they should take one of the little steamers which touched here and there along the river. As he sat opposite her, in the crowd of a bright afternoon, and listened to the quick questions and comments which she threw across at him,

in spite of the incessant noise and the blasts of the whistle, Cushing had been impressed again by her restlessness. His recollections of her, he thought, had been surprisingly just. Her exterior had not deepened and mellowed into subtler shades. It was only a little more accentuated than he remembered it, as the tint of her hair was a little yellower and her cheeks a little pinker. She had talked ceaselessly, giving him odd bits of information about her life and her friends and laughing at his amusement at her definitions; and she had kept to the same key while they walked up the long hill at S. Cloud, past the strident music in the cafés and past the sunken court of the *Caserne*.

He had been rather glad that, when they reached the first line of the gardens, she should have fallen in with some American friends, who were going in the opposite direction, and that while she paused to talk to them he had had his chance to go on and so to have his first glimpse of the wide outlook alone. But as Mrs. Herring came up the last steps and he turned to meet her, he was struck by the fact that, in spite of the evident animation of her exchange with the people below, one of the quick fluctuations of mood which he so well remembered had meanwhile come over her.

Her first words, as she paused beside him at the edge of the balustrade, and though they were spoken in her usual bantering tone, had also a deeper note. "Why did you hurry on? Were you afraid of the scandal of being seen with me?"

"Scarcely—since so far as I go it would be so much worse a scandal plainly and openly to have deserted you."

"Yes—and in such a spot as this things have such implications! Ah, well, I suppose that what we both really mind is not the implication but the lack of any reality behind it. That means one's older. It means that people know I've become the kind of woman whose excesses are only conversational. Four or five years ago, if we'd come here on such a day and with such sunshine, whoever we met would have perhaps forgiven me for not marrying you; but they wouldn't have forgiven you," she smiled, "for not marrying me! Do you realise that?"

"Perhaps I do," he returned her amusement; "but it's only when you admit to me that you, too, realise it——"

"That it really seems terrible and true?" She drew the long gloves she had taken off through her hands, and her eyes fell from the horizon to the figures which came and went below them. "Yes, it has its suggestion of romance, this place, hasn't it? Even tourists like these become a little romantic; it's only you and I who remain set and obvious."

Her voice had sunk to soberness, and after another pause she abruptly exclaimed: "Your chance of romance and mine—it's somewhat paradoxical that they should have decamped together!"

Cushing felt the blood rise in his face. His constant sense of a consideration due her could not lessen his instinctive defence of his own privacies. But as he turned towards her, conscious of the change in his expression, she took up before he had uttered it his evident declaration of the point beyond which she could not pass.

"No, I know your wife's none of my affair. And yet, in a ridiculous way, she is because Arthur is. All that isn't my affair, let's say, is what you lost with her. But

what does concern me is what I lost with him. Romance! It comes down to the concrete, doesn't it? And in the last year or so I don't pretend to you that I haven't thought of his yacht and his comforts—especially when I got my bills and realised what things cost!”

Cushing felt that his glance softened. “I don't believe it's been particularly easy—has it?”

She turned and met him with a grave attention. “Just what do you mean? Do you mean that it hasn't been particularly easy to live on a small income, with my tastes, when I should very much have preferred Arthur Irish's income? Or do you mean that none of it's been particularly easy—the getting up each morning and the going to bed each night? Of course it's been easy; anything is, once one's sufficiently drugged by habit!” Her eyes wavered and he saw that her lips quivered lightly. “Ah, what a lie that is!” she ended.

Cushing waited for an instant. By a trick of the perceptions when the mind is intensely occupied, he seemed unable to drive his thoughts farther than the twists and curves of the smoke of the cigarette he held, as it rose, thin and tortuous, in the pale still air. It was one of those moments when he scarcely knew by what mental deductions he proceeded, but when he felt, with the progress of each second, a more definite determination. He was vaguely conscious that the determination was temporary—even that it was momentary. Yet, though he could not clearly discern its beginnings and though he knew that it was rooted in outgrown habits and long since surfeited desires, its force had the force of all intangible demands and loyalties.

“I didn't come over to ask you—I've not been clear as

to whether it were fair for me to ask any one;" he spoke directly; "but if you think it will be for your happiness, will you marry me?"

Geraldine's eyes rose quickly to his. "Marry you? I?"

"I'm not such a fool that I don't realise how generous it would be of you to show me such generosity. But if you feel——" he broke off. "I only want you to know that I'll do my best——"

She had turned her back to the balustrade and her eyes again rose to meet his, before they fell to the point of her parasol, with which she was drawing some slow design on the gravel. "Good heavens, no!" she replied lightly. "I shouldn't think of it."

"Because you feel I'm not in earnest, because you feel I've still ties—at least of some invisible sort? Of course I've ties; so have you. But that's not the point. I've been profoundly happy and profoundly unhappy. You know that. But one doesn't necessarily live by one's lifeless recollections——"

Mrs. Herring continued for a second to trace her cryptic figure, and then she said, without meeting his eyes but with clear distinctness: "I have."

"You mean——" he caught himself up and flushed deeply.

"I mean just that. I've lived on recollections, which were thin and bodiless enough, poor things! And when one's done that"—for the first time her colour, too, changed—"no, thanks, one prefers them to certain sorts of actuality."

"Oh, I know I must put it coldly and inanely," he broke out. "But I don't feel it coldly. If you knew the countless hours through which I've reproached myself,

the countless stupidities I've understood I must have committed!"

"I do know—since I know you." She hesitated and shook her head. "No, understanding as you've been, it's been impossible for you not to stumble into misunderstandings. As if one could avoid it, in such a ridiculous situation!—knowing that a woman with whom one had long since broken had continued, without rhyme or reason,—well, to feel that she hadn't broken. If you assumed one thing you were fatuous, and if you assumed the other you were unkind; it must have been hopelessly difficult and hopelessly absurd. You haven't meant it that way, I know, but you're absurd to ask me to marry you."

"You think I couldn't make you happy—or myself, either? You've forgotten, then,—you've forgotten days we've had together which were everything happy."

"No. I've scarcely forgotten." She smiled. "And I'm scarcely so stupid that I don't know we could be happy again. There's everything for you to do for me, and there are, perhaps, things I could do for you."

"Then why——"

She broke his question in two. "Tell me! In the best times of your feeling for your wife—in the very best times of it—didn't you have something which you couldn't relive with any one else?"

Cushing's eyes turned again to the distance, with its hazy golden lights. "One never relives anything. But there are different things—things not, perhaps, of the same quality, but with all the quality of what makes them valuable——"

"And yet one doesn't relive—that you grant. Well,"

she gave a quick sigh, "that's just it. I can't relive. I can't risk, as a matter of concession—perhaps as a matter of the first wisdom of middle-age!—the sacrifice of the memory of what we once did spontaneously and with all the best of us. Not such a magnificent best—especially so far as you went—I know that; but it's been enough. If I married you, don't you see I'd lose everything?" She was silent for some moments, and then she turned and laid her hand briefly on his arm. "It was nice of you, though." An instant later she added: "Do you know I've often wondered whether the relation between your wife and Arthur has been anything like what once existed between you and me!"

Cushing was conscious of the sarcasm of his showing such a sensitiveness, after the words they had just exchanged, and yet his defensive attitude instinctively rose. "I've troubled very little about what has or hasn't existed between them."

Her eyes continued to scan his face. "Yes—I know all that. But has it ever occurred to you that—well, that very much this same sort of thing may have taken place? That, before he proposed to Dorothy Frame, he may have proposed to her? And it's obvious enough, if he did, that she refused him. That's what I wonder; why should she have refused him?"

"Refused him!" Cushing hesitated for a second, again with an impulse to defend what had cost him such intimate pain from even the touch of words; then he returned to Mrs. Herring a look in which the irony and the sadness of her own look were reflected. "Ah, if she refused him—and no matter how much she may have felt—it was because she plainly saw the game was up for her.

She's not got the power you've got of wide feeling—of paying for what one can't see. You must remember that there's one thing she doesn't lose, one thing that's underneath her feeling itself, and that is a clear sense of calculation."

XXX

ANNE-MARIE had travelled directly from Havre to Paris. Her nearest approach to the formulation of her plans had been her decision to take a little apartment there, so small that her means could also permit a breath of change and a quiet *villégiature* in the summers. While she looked about for something suitable she had concluded to settle temporarily at a pension at Auteuil, of which she had heard from her relatives, and where she would be likely to find the quiet which above all else she wanted.

The room she chose, for the fortnight of her stay, opened on the small garden; and it was as she sat looking out at the shift of the pale winter shadows on the walks and the quiver of the bare poplars in the wind that she slowly began to clear a way through her thoughts. Once she was at the point of being established and safe from even the inconsistencies which might arise in herself, it was no longer the menace of her future which she dreaded but the insistence of her memories. Her first requisite was for the widest possible difference from Morte, some place where there was no reminder of all that had surrounded Irish. It was one of the results of her year with him that now her greatest desire was to feel herself ignored, and the people in the house were so

far removed from the contacts of her class that their gossip itself, as they sat at the long table in the *salle-à-manger*, was harmless and attenuated. The very restrictions and discomforts gave her an assurance of privacy and protection. She liked the plainness of the furniture, the heavy lavender-scented linen and the tart odour of the waxed floors, and she could feel, when she closed her door at night, that a year could pass as insensibly as the days in such obscurity.

As she began to rebalance her views, she realised that this sense of a refuge in the strictly conventional was the first sign of her return to the habits and beliefs of her country. Little by little she had resumed the careful standards which revived in her with the revival of her early recollections. On her trip from Havre, as the train passed through the wide sweep of the open country, with the fields lying like a grey reflection of the winter clouds and the streams between drawn as carefully and exactly as with a pencil, the landscape had seemed to her to compose and to take its colours, even in this dull season, with the smooth beauty which France alone possessed. She had felt the tears rise hotly to her eyes. The rebirth of her love for it was like the reward for too long an exile. Yet the more strongly the renewal of her connection with France reasserted itself, the more she realised the exactions of its laws and customs. Once she had set herself to the task of finding a suitable apartment, the practical penalties of a life deflected from its natural course began to impress her in the subtlest ways. She had always acknowledged them, but as part of what she herself owed the society whose laws she had outraged rather than as the exaction which such a codification of

morals imposed on her. As she went from house to house, to make her enquiries, her appearance, she noticed, could not obscure the equivocal tone of her errand. She felt the sense of unspoken questions, of furtive glances, of an evasion here and a polite declination there, as she could never have felt them in London or in New York.

She had been happy to find at last a tiny *entresol* which was within her means, and to find it in the rue de Bellechasse. On the first day when she paused before the house, which was shabbier and more silent than the house in which Miss Morrow had lived, she vividly recollected the sense of refuge which, even as a child, the street had given her and how often she had felt a friendly sympathy for the long rows of windows on either side, some shuttered and some open, but all with the suggestion of a deep, rich life led behind them. It happened that an old cousin of her father's, Madame de Jobourg, kept on one of the upper floors of the house an apartment for use on the rare occasions when she left her home in the Isle-et-Vilaine and came to Paris for a family duty or a family *deuil*. She chanced to be in town when Anne-Marie made her first visit of inspection; and after she had decided that the small apartment was what she wanted, Anne-Marie had sent up her card, with the written request that Madame la Marquise would receive her.

The season at which she had arrived had been that when most people were in the country, at their estates. She had long since decided that, even when the relatives who would be most definitely interested in her returned, she would make no advances which could possibly proclaim her unaware of her situation. But as she sat talk-

ing to Madame de Jobourg, in the close old room, with its furniture so scrupulously covered and its faint odour of dust, the reflection she caught of herself in the long mirrors reassured her. Under the ornate *lustres*—the only ornaments of an interior given over to the conservations of piety rather than to decoration, and which so added to the impression of height and light—she could see that she fitted into the picture as it fitted the wide spaces to which she was fundamentally accustomed. At least she could say for herself that she had never denied what she had done. The lack of propriety in the New York life had puzzled her more than her defiance of propriety in London; and it was like an explanation of this inner sense to find that, whether Madame de Jobourg knew of her year with Irish or not, the single fact which existed for people of this training was that she had been divorced. In the plain old lady, so drooping and so out of date and whose standard of conduct was more implacable than all other criteria, Anne-Marie recognised, as soon as she had murmured her first deferential "*chère cousine*," the existence of simple ethics, no matter how closely they were interpreted. She had, after all, been married to an American, a man without a church and a visible part of no social order. The misfortune of her situation could not conceal the perfection of her breeding. She knew to the finest shade the difference between obsequiousness and pride. She did not apologise for what had taken place, but she implied the most dignified regret, and her strict view of the conventionalities of her negative position did not waver. She would never expect Madame de Jobourg to receive her on her days or to occupy herself with her in any way. She merely stated

that, for the sake of the family name she had resumed, she would prefer to be established in a house where she had the tacit protection of such a presence.

When she had moved to the *entresol*, and though the elderly lady's consent had not gone beyond the most technical formality, Anne-Marie began to see that, limited as they might be, she could extract some accommodations from her care to behave with every propriety. It was in her tradition to treat age with the most courteous deference. Her rare visits to Madame de Jobourg, her remembrance of her cousin's small tastes and preferences, her attention to her reminiscences and her advice about her eternal embroidery, never tempted her to stay when some one else was announced or to enlarge the amount of recognition accorded her. But it had given her enough sense of stability to enable her to feel that her little rooms had their own dignity. She had gathered together her parents' furniture, which had for years been in the charge of the old servant who now came to her as her single maid. The severe beauty of the stiff consoles and *bergères*, softened by their shabbiness, the portrait of her grand-uncle, the late Cardinal de Maupertuis, and the small remnants of the family plate, surrounded her with reassurances which it would have been difficult to define, but which were none the less definitely present.

As soon as she felt herself settled her life had slipped insensibly into a regular routine—a short walk, a few moments at church, an occasional visit, and long hours spent in the effort to increase the neat piles of linen in her cupboard. It was part of her inheritance to be content with the significance of the perfunctory. But as she sat sewing, evening after evening, in her silent little

salon, she sometimes caught the start of her astonishment. Beyond her still vital pain at the loss of Irish, she wondered now how she had dared undertake such an adventure. If she had risked it in France, with the perceptions of a Frenchman to help her, the breach of propriety would have seemed even less excusable but more natural. The intrusion of the Anglo-Saxon element, as she reflected, with a retrospective wit, had made its difficulties as practical as the difficulties of her marriage and had given it a suggestion of Irish's diletantism.

She had felt another kind of astonishment when she had gone to pay her respects to those relatives who signified their wish to see her. Their talk seemed to her to extend unbrokenly, from salon to salon, in an equal ignorance of what she herself had learned. The older people she saw were compounds of astuteness and piety. The younger had not looked beyond their carefully arranged boundaries any further than to assume that they must imitate the English love of sport and that all Americans were vulgar and over-dressed. In no instance had she been able to penetrate beyond these conclusions; and her own experiences had seemed like the height of initiation in contrast.

It was not so much that these localisms were strange as the inevitable localism which all fixed rules must assume to a woman whose life has been varied. Even conduct like Madame von Alfons' had its rules. The first time she had gone to the large hôtel where the Maupertuis family relics tempered the modern gilt furniture, and in spite of the lack, in her reception, of the consideration Madame von Alfons had shown her at Morte, Anne-Marie had been surprised to find herself condemning her

cousin for being unfeeling rather than for being immoral. While she watched Mimi dutifully divide herself between her husband, her children and the person without whom, as she admitted, she found life too unsympathetic, she had been first puzzled and then lightly disdainful. To treat such things so regularly and frankly made them small and parochial. She was glad, as she remembered the terms of her compact with Irish, that if she had not been vulgarly insistent about the loss of her reputation, she had at least acted on a large and free scale. If she had continued to live amongst these people, and without a wider vision, she could see the compacts she would have made and which would have seemed important to her—compacts at which she now smiled. It was another reminder of the extension of her own imagination. It was not only the rules of the society around her which appeared rigid, but also its capacity to feel. All it saw was that one either remained permanently outside its privileges, like Miss Morrow or like the American aunt through whom Miss Morrow had known her and who, in spite of the happiest marriage, was always a person who had come from the strange world *là-bas*; or one was fundamentally absorbed, as she would have been absorbed, into a life whose complex conformities hid the simplest bases.

Yet in spite of her surprise at these restrictions, she found herself gradually accepting them. She could feel that her judgments were insensibly becoming narrower, her code more exact and her tastes less pronounced. It was as strange to compare this even, reposeful life with her days at Morte, one sombre and the next brilliant, as it was strange, when she looked in her mirror, to note the

change in her appearance. As she put on the plain, dark dresses she habitually wore she remembered the amount of space in Stratton street given up to her wardrobe—that Irish had never seen a rare combination of tints or a good texture that he had not insisted she must have a dress or a wrap of it. To look back at this extravagance now was to understand that it befitted only a woman of no reputation or an American. If she felt traces of her former habits, the time when she had had to pay a penalty for them was still so near that, with a shift of her eyes, she could make the comparison and see what she had gained. The faint fine line drawn across her forehead reminded her that she had learned her lesson of the disparity between desire and achievement.

At the New Year she had sent, among her few greetings, a brief note to Fresneuil's French address. She had noticed that in his reply he took care to make it plain that he had left London and was permanently established in his Paris apartment. The exact courtesy of his letter had not attempted to deny his eagerness to see her; and after a delay during which she had debated the propriety of her doing so, she had accepted in good faith his implication that he was now occupied with only his own affairs and had written to him that she would receive him.

Her strangest sense, on the afternoon when he came, was that he was too thoroughly French to have expected in her any precesses of reconstruction. He seemed instinctively to know that after such an experience one reconstructed only if one distorted simple facts, and he had evidently never questioned the clearness of her inner view. She had accepted both the privileges and the exactions

of what she had undertaken, and he had divined that all she needed was time to make her resigned to the fact that both the happiness and unhappiness of the matter were over. She could see that he viewed it as directly as she. But it was also evident that he understood that if she were a little scarred she was none the less exquisite. The women whom he knew with pasts, in the usual sense, she could picture as probably complacent and comfortable—sometimes even maternal, with the angles of their perceptions smoothly rubbed down and an almost inevitable coarsening into the ordinary lines. As she gave him her hand and let him measure the gravity of her eyes, she felt that he paid tribute to her special quality by recognising that she had kept herself free from the usual signs of such experiences.

This instant reassurance of the discriminations of his taste had dispelled any difficulty which, in such surroundings, she might have felt in seeing him. He had made no faintest allusion to Irish, to Morte or to their meeting in Stratton street, and they had begun to talk with the easy disregard of explanations natural to them both. He congratulated her on the charm of her little rooms, and they smiled together over the intricate beauties in which all old Parisian houses abound and which lurk most in inner courts and hidden bits of garden. He had brought her some books and the new Odéon play, and Anne-Marie could feel the rise of her interest and the faint glow which warmed her responses.

The light had faded to a silvery grey and the *bonne* was on the threshold with a lamp when Fresneuil rose to go.

"I cannot tell you, madame, what a happiness it has

been to me to see you again. You will not forget your promises: I may come next week, and I may bring you the Vignys you do not know and the photographs of the little mantel at Fontainebleau which, in its more ornate way, still resembles yours. Ah, if you love good mantels I should so like to have you see ours—at la Reveillière—the home which is my old one and which now becomes mine again. Some of them are severe, but the largest salon and the *Salle-d'Armes* have magnificent ones, and they are all beautifully set. Have you ever noticed how the height of a chimney piece, in proportion to its decoration, can make it imposing or unimportant? They knew balance, then——”

She glanced pensively up at him. As his face lit, in the dim diffusion of the lamplight, she understood that this was Fresneuil as she had never seen or heard him—neither Irish's Fresneuil nor the cosmopolitan, but the man of his own race. She knew that he had never dispersed his views or his quality; yet now he had all the freedom of his own position and the privileges of that position to accentuate him.

“Tell me, monsieur—you remain in Paris?”

“Yes. I shall be here for the next months. There are some necessary repairs being made at la Reveillière, and I shall run down on and off to see to them.”

“And your mother—you have spoken to me of her; she remains there during the work?”

“No. She and my aunt are now with me here—at my apartment. It was really impossible, down in the country. Poor ladies, they find the quarters very cramped and my *ménage de garçon* very uncomfortable; but none the less they remain with me——”

He broke off. She saw that in his face there was a look compounded both of a sudden pained embarrassment and of a vivid regret. A second later she understood, and she felt that her own expression changed to reflect it. In an instant all that separated her from him and from any share in the life and the projects of such people as his mother rose in her mind. His delicacy could not disguise from her the fact that he was as much aware of the separation as she. The smallest incidents of what he must have seen and divined in Stratton street rose in her mind; not only the things which, in spite of all her care, must have seemed crass, but also her inevitable confidences to him. For a moment they seemed to her to be back in the Morte woods and in all the complexity of circumstance in which they had talked beside the river.

She made a gesture which was amplified with her sense of all these recollections, as she rose to bid him good-bye.

"Yes, I shall be glad to see you again, to have the books and to hear your news. It has been charming;" she hesitated, as he raised her hand to his lips, and her smile quivered a little under the pressure of her thoughts. "It is when one feels one's self alone that charming things count—when one feels, as I have come to feel, not that life is so terrible, but that it is so simple!"

XXXI

ONE morning in April, when Fresneuil reached the house in the rue de Bellechasse, he heard that since it was a Feast day Madame du Chastel had gone to a late mass. The old servant who gave him the information had come, in the last weeks, to have for him the kindly interest of a person bred to the service of such families, and she advised him, if his errand with madame were pressing—as it appeared to be—to follow her to church. She went, as a rule, not to the church of her parish, but to S. Germain-des-Près, where one of the *curés* was a friend of Madame de Jobourg; and after mass, especially after late mass, she was apt to walk to the Luxembourg gardens and sit there.

Fresneuil thanked her, and after leaving the house he turned in the direction of the Faubourg which would lead him to the church. As he hurried along, with the radiance of the spring morning about him, he was more and more imperatively aware of his need to see Anne-Marie. Yet his excuse for coming, and at such an hour, was that he was fulfilling her need rather than his. When he had opened his morning papers and read the news which so intimately concerned her, he had hesitated and debated his right to take it to her out of consideration for her feeling. Beneath his vivid eagerness to see what her reception of it would be, he felt the reassurance of an acquired right of friendship. Since their meeting, soon after the New Year, he had seen her, not perhaps constantly, but with ritual regularity. She never allowed him to come except at the intervals she had stated or

unduly to prolong his visits. But he had had his reward, first in her frank pleasure in his companionship and then in her gradual dependence on it.

The fact that they had never spoken of Irish or of that part of her life which, as he could see she now realised, he had so eagerly watched, had determined him to risk the allusions which his news would require him to make. It had not only been his sense of her intact distinction which was heightened by this silence—a silence which was not the embarrassed avoidance of a term or a name, but rather the deeper silence of a perfect reticence. He had felt all the ebb and flow of her feeling behind the barrier he could not penetrate. The look of quiet fatigue with which she sometimes greeted him, with a turn of her head in his direction as if she turned away from the havoc of her thoughts, the absent quality in her smile, the light tremulousness of her hand, with the fine bones showing under the yellowish skin, were constant suggestions of her mystery and of the combats and adjustments necessary in a woman made of such delicate material. It had seemed to Fresneuil that if she had lost what was technically known as perfection, it was he who saw both how fine she had kept her discriminations and how much their maintenance had cost her.

The last mass was over when he reached the church; and after he had pushed aside the leather curtain in front of the door he made her out at once among the few people who remained. As his eyes became accustomed to the comparative obscurity, he felt himself deeply affected by something in her attitude. In the dim brown light her kneeling figure was motionless; with her face raised, her hands clasped and her wide eyes set in front

of her, she reminded him of the thin pointed flames of the candles on the altar. All that she had experienced was expressed in the way she knelt. He had never so clearly understood as at this moment what her inner suffering must have been, and what exactions her successive failures must have put upon her; or the change from the brilliancy of her life to a renouncement which had no brilliancy, but only the same pale steadiness as her face. Her resignation seemed to him deeper than resignation. Her delicate quality had been so bruised that something fundamental had changed in her. He could fancy that when she had first prayed here she must still have been bent by the weight of her loss and her uncertainties, with little left her beyond the emotional relief of supplication. Now it was the measure for him of how far her difficulties had driven her that the way she knelt was not passionate but correct. She was no longer vitally concerned with her own needs. She had recovered a vague resemblance to the woman of Catholic family who sees in her religion the most consecrated form of custom. For the first time, as he stood intently watching her, the distances she had travelled became actual to him, and he felt that his eyes grew suddenly warm and dim.

They left the church together, and by common consent they turned up the long passage of the rue Bonaparte, where the light, which gathered into glistening squares at the crossings, darkened to a thinly spread silver. In a few moments more they had entered the nearest gate of the gardens. As they walked, and though they had exchanged their usual light observations, which never had the quality of banalities, Fresneuil had been increasingly conscious of Anne-Marie's sense of his purpose. It

was not until they had paused and had drawn forward two of the yellow chairs close to the Medici fountain, where the drip of water was pleasantly confused with the cries of the children who played in the allée beyond, that she turned to him, not with any invitation to speak, but with a permission to do so in her gravely attentive look.

"I wanted to tell you—I felt I might perhaps assume the privilege of telling you," he began directly, "that yesterday Mr. Irish and Miss Frame were married in London."

She took the newspaper he held out to her and he saw her eyelids tremble and her lips press more closely together. A second later she raised her head and looked fixedly in front of her.

"I believed you would not consider it a liberty." He hurried on, as if he were at last giving words to the suppressed thoughts which had so thickly accumulated. "Since the marriage had evidently taken place rather earlier than one expected it to, and since I, at least, up to the last moment never felt sure——"

She turned her face back to his.

"Of me?" she asked briefly.

"Ah, madame, always and forever of you! But not of Mr. Irish. Can you understand," he clasped his hands, "that what I have dreaded for you beyond everything else was that he would change that erratic mind of his—I may say it, since we are talking openly?—that he might continue to plead with you? I knew—I was then still in London—how he had pled with you, at first. I remember all the letters and telegrams. They were not what I dreaded. I knew you would answer them as you did answer them—by silence. What I feared was that at the

last moment before his marriage he would realise where he stood, what he had done, what he was losing—and that even at the eleventh hour he might put you through the miseries of a reconsideration.”

“Yes; that I, too, have dreaded.” She spoke in a low tone, again with her eyes set straight before her.

“You may have had your dread, but you have always been clear and always wonderful. If you knew what it has meant to me to see you live, as you have lived, and when I could remember so much to make it difficult for you to live at all——! Sometimes, in the last three months, when I have left you, I acknowledge that I have rebelled against the intolerable injustices of it all; ah, not the fact that it did not result in your marriage and in your established happiness, but—no, madame, you will allow me?—but the fact that you should have given so much. Such priceless things as even I, an outsider, have seen you give!”

She drew a long breath and her glance fell to the paper she still held. “It is announced—is it not?—with the elaboration of the announcements of royalty!” Her dim smile showed for an instant, and then he saw her tears well up. “Ah, well, if I gave—if I have had my moments of rebellion—at least everything is over. That you must remember, you who give me so much friendship. My life has been enriched. But then, too, I acknowledge——”

“You have suffered? Ah, but you have suffered!”

“It is not so much what I have suffered,” she said slowly, “but what I have lost.”

“You mean the loss of Mr. Irish?”

"I mean the loss of something in myself; I mean the loss," she met his look again, "of my position."

For an instant their eyes exchanged quick meanings, and Fresneuil paled a little.

"If you could know what it was, to see what you were losing, to be helpless, and yet——"

"I should like you to understand—since we will speak of these things once and never again," she said clearly. "When I left America with Mr. Irish I knew that that loss mattered. But one does not know the real concessions involved in such a step until one takes it. If I had known—but what can one know of past possibilities, unless one is a sentimentalist? You and I," her smile gleamed again, "are scarcely sentimentalists. No; I want you to see that I frankly acknowledge what my step cost me; I want you to see that, if I pay for my *déclassement*, I pay with my eyes open."

"Ah, madame, have I not seen it? Has it not occupied my thoughts beyond everything else in life——!"

Fresneuil broke off. He had the sense that the question as to whether she realised how intimately his personal feeling was concerned was answered before she could answer him. His exclamation seemed to him to be his final protest against the problems between which he had stood so unhappily and so irresolute—the expression of the helplessness with which he himself had to pay the penalty of her lapse of conduct. In spite of his width of experience and contact, he knew he could apply to the woman he married only the closest provincial standards. He was even less free to marry where he pleased than most men of his race and class, because of the restoration of his line to him, his recovered home and

his reunited family. Yet he could never remember the days of his first knowledge of her without remembering that, even then, what had most struck him was the sad incongruity between her and the position she occupied. It had become the most intimate form of his difficulty that she should have changed—that she should be free—that she should resume, under his eyes, and so beautifully, the outward signs of conventionality. As she sat beside him the different carriage of her head, not less high but with an assurance quieter and less spirited, and the way her black dress fell from her thin shoulders, touched him with an inimitable pathos. The next instant his eyes had dropped to the hand from which she had drawn her glove. On it, a vivid flash of green against the pale skin, he saw Irish's emerald. He knew that it was the only jewel she had kept and that she never wore it except when she was alone—that only accident had disclosed it to him now. But it was the final touch to his sense of the futility of his rebellion.

All through his struggle with these unalterable facts he had felt himself sustained by the knowledge that she herself would have respected him less if he had been willing to omit these tests of conduct. It was she who broke their silence now, with a quick gesture.

"You must let me say it again. You have been perfect—*d'une délicatesse parfaite*. Ah, but I am grateful for it! And as for all that has not been said, that can never be said, between us——" she paused uncertainly.

He appeared for a moment to share her uncertainty. "At least," he said in a low tone, "I have tried, even in my thoughts, to show you how profoundly I reverence you——"

"But that I know you have done, and so exquisitely! It is not only that you have surrounded with consideration a memory—a memory which has its great beauty for me——" she hesitated again and her whole carriage imperceptibly stiffened with a touch of pride. "But you have also avoided even the suspicion that I would tolerate any compromises with dignity, any concession to laws you and I know are inexorable." She held out her hand. "That is why I have said this to you; I wanted you to see that I understood. Let us keep all we can, by our mutual understanding—all our friendship and all its charm. But never forget that I have the keenest sense of what I owe you."

Fresneuil had risen and he bowed over her hand, in response to her gesture of dismissal. The courtesy of his manner had never been more profound; yet the last look he gave her lit, for a second, with the most impulsive feeling she had ever seen him show.

"Ah, madame—*si vous saviez*——"

"*Mais mon ami, je le sais—mais si, mais si, je le sais.*" She faltered for a second, with her eyes still wide and grave. There flashed across her face, as if in contradiction to her words, the same puzzled expression she had had when some one of Irish's Americanisms seemed to her incomprehensible. Then, with an inclination of her head, she added briefly: "Thank you again, and *à bientôt.*"

As his figure receded in the direction of the palace and passed down the long flight of steps and out of her sight, Anne-Marie's glance fell absently to the fantastic pattern which the shadow of the young leaves threw on the walk at her feet.

Her thoughts had wandered beyond the details of the information contained in the newspaper which still lay in her lap. They had gone irrelevantly back, first to one or two of her days with Irish, then to the day when she had consented to marry Cushing, and finally to a recollection which was fainter yet which she could nevertheless vividly evoke—that of the day when Miss Morrow, looking at her so uncertainly, had agreed to become her guardian. She felt a flash of irony at the fact that these circumstances, so wide in their difference, should have brought her to the point where her single desire was to foresee her surprises. The sharpest astonishment she had ever known had been at unexpected turns in her own feeling. It was, perhaps, the penalty of her varied life that she should have become aware of unexpected and unaccountable differentiations, and that her vision should at times be blurred and uncertain. But she was aware that, in the last months, this sense of a confusion in the furthest depths of her mind—the sense of an uncertainty beneath all her recently acquired certainty—had never possessed her more strongly than at this moment.

It was an impulse connected with this reflection which made her raise her hands and press them against her eyes. As she did so she was conscious that she had shut out her present world as she shut out the vivid light, the glancing figures of the children and the fresh brown colour of the upturned earth in the border beside her, and that she was enclosed in an inner world where, down to the depths of all her premises, there was a sudden commotion. She had these insurgent rushes of feeling frequently. It was impossible, she supposed, to forget one's experiences so completely that they could not unsettle one

and make one restless. Yet her impulses of rebellion always led her in the same direction, and back to the early times of her marriage. Across the intervening years, her happiness then had come to have for her a touching and ineffable quality—the quality of feeling when it is freshest and most spontaneous. The recollection always blew through her mind like a keen sea wind. It carried her now up and beyond the shifts and compacts which were the tolls of experience.

It had seemed to be the strange survival of Cushing's quality that he should have assumed this particular place in her thoughts. She had gradually come to feel, when she was confused and when her hard mental processes confused her more, that the one thing she could always have been sure of was the large inclusiveness of his imagination. He had been more certain of his feelings than any one she had ever known: not certain of his stand-points, as she had once thought, but of his feelings. It was he who would have understood that when one had had some opportunity for comparison and selection, what counted most was what would have seemed to Fresneuil, and to Irish, too, the last paradox—that one should be able to yield everything to the adventurous beauty of the indefinite. Her mind took another quick turn. She wondered whether, if Cushing had been in Fresneuil's place, he would have been willing to accept her, with her history. She asked herself the question, but every memory she had of him answered it. Though he would never for the smallest instant have ceased to remember what she had lost, was there any slightest doubt that, if he had loved her, he would have accepted everything? It would have been natural to the height and breadth of his feel-

ing to suffer because of her *liaison*, and yet to forgive it; as natural as it would be to her—she found herself sitting upright, with her hands fallen to her lap, smiling at the idea—as natural as it would be to her, if she heard now that he had lived the intervening year without a love affair of his own, to be a little surprised at him.

XXXII

MADAME ANNE-MARIE DU CHASTEL, 20, bis, rue de Bellechasse."

As a motor cab hurried Cushing across Paris he drew out the memorandum and studied it again. It had been brought to his hotel ten minutes before, by one of Madame von Alfons' footmen; and ever since the first instant he had looked at it and at the definite opportunity which it represented, he had had the sardonic sense that already he felt a faint trace of his wife's old power to create in him the keen attitude of expectation.

It had been only an hour before, when he sat smoking in his sitting room, with the contents of his trunks strewn about him and his eyes following the long coil of traffic which wound like a broken stream through the last glow of sunlight in the Place de la Concorde, that he had made his completely unexpected decision. He called it unexpected, and yet he was aware of his gradual preparation for it, in the preceding weeks of his stay. It had perhaps been the fact that he was to leave for America to-morrow which had so suddenly determined him to make a move which, a few hours later, would be definitely impossible. However it was, his brief note to Madame von

Alfons asking for her cousin's present address had attempted to disguise the definition of his position from her no more than from himself. There were certain money matters, he acknowledged, which, in view of her present circumstances, he had concluded that he ought to discuss with Anne-Marie. But his reason for asking where she could be found was the simple one that he wished to see her—granting that, on her side, she was willing to receive him.

Madame von Alfons' reply, enclosing the address, had made him smile as he read it. Its courteous tone, exact and scrupulously careful, had its inimitable implications that he was, after all, another type of human being, whose desires one could not foretell and whose mental processes were untraceable. She was glad to tell him where her cousin was; he would find her living very quietly at the address she enclosed, and she felt that she could predict that Anne-Marie would see him. There was a touch, at the last, before she signed herself with many salutations, which showed that already she had made, in her quick mind, a combination between his visit and the possibility of material gain for Anne-Marie. She plainly indicated that she had not been in sympathy with her cousin's fantastic refusal to receive any settlement from him, and that this would be an opportunity to show his generosity, if he now cared to renew an offer of it.

Yet adroit as such methods were, what he had always thought of as her supreme astuteness appeared to Cushing, as he read the note, to be little more than a vast ignorance. The exactions of her code for once lacked reality. He had yielded to an impulse the worth of which was its exemption from the laws of logic and of consecutive con-

duct. The warmth of the late sun on his face, the delays at the crossings, with the hum of the racing motor engine mingling with the clatter of trams, the glancing intelligence of the faces he passed, the gradual gathering of the streets into darker and higher slits, acted on him like the stimulants into which all outer circumstances are transformed when a disused energy has been retouched with life. It scarcely mattered that his visit might have the air of an intrusion. Whether consistently with his own attitude or not, he had brought about an opportunity to grasp some of those fugitive moments into which so much of the sense of living can be compressed. If he had been younger he would perhaps never have risked it; there were countless deterrent forces against the definite and insistent press of his desire. As his cab turned into the familiar street, from which the sunshine had already passed, it gave him a faint sense of sadness to think that his capacity to feel should have persisted, in any of its first strength, across such an arid waste of experience.

He waited in the cab while the concierge took up his card, on which he had written a brief message. The man delayed for some moments; but when he returned it was with the information that madame was in and would see him. Cushing mounted the short flight of stairs, to where the maid stood waiting at an open door. He saw that she turned back, into an inner room, and he heard his name pronounced; and as he stepped forward in response to her gesture, he spared a moment of astonishment to the ease with which important occasions bring themselves about.

Anne-Marie was standing by the window—he could imagine that she had stood in the same intent attitude and

with the same motionlessness ever since his message had reached her—and for some seconds they confronted each other across the warm spring dusk which already filled the room. Cushing had been prepared for her astonishment at the mere sound of his name. Yet something in the immobility of her pose, in the directness of her gaze, in the absolute stillness of her clasped hands, reminded him that any astonishment would be suppressed in her now by the hardly learned control of experience.

She spoke at once, in a low voice. "You wanted to see me?"

Cushing bent his head, without replying, and she continued: "Your visit surprises me. I had scarcely expected it. But if there is anything you wish to say to me——"

He took up her phrase. "It's exceedingly good of you to give me this chance to say it. You don't mind, I hope? If you do mind, you've only to say so frankly. Yes, there were one or two things I felt I had better put before you; and since I am leaving for America to-morrow this was my only chance."

"Yes?" she asked. Her voice was as inflexible as her attitude and the courtesy of her attention had not the smallest trace of warmth.

He continued. "It's of course inevitable that I should realise the great change in your circumstances. I've not come to discuss them with you—I retain no right to do that. But I want you to know that this afternoon, while I was waiting for Madame von Alfons to send me your address, I wrote to the lawyer whom I remember to have seen at the time of our marriage."

"Yes?" she said again. She had continued to stand

motionlessly, but now she slightly turned her head, and as the last glow from the window fell on her Cushing waited. His first clear view of her face brought a quick light to his eyes. He had never felt as poignantly the pervasive thrill which her beauty could give. It had reached its highest point of expression for him in this pale, calm steadiness, which suggested nothing so much as a grave disillusion and a knowledge of life which was merely practical.

He pursued, conscious of the growing effort which each phrase cost him. "I have arranged to deposit with Maitre Duclos a sum of money which—as he will thoroughly understand—I consider absolutely and fairly yours. I have arranged too for future payments—no, wait a second!" He interrupted her low murmur. "Don't refuse and don't protest now. Later you can think it over. I don't want our only talk to be that—to be nothing but a question of your protests and of mine."

Anne-Marie was silent. She had unclasped her hands and rested one of them on the table. With his old sense of the importance which attached to her smallest movement, and particularly to the movements of her hands, Cushing's eyes fixed on the thin fingers and he saw that they were stirred by the lightest tremble.

"What I want to say to you—what I want to have you know, since I shan't come again, is the reason why I came." He smiled. "But you know it! I wanted to see you—just that. There was no reason, no excuse. It was the last thing in the world I'd expected to do, and perhaps it was ill-judged. All I can tell you is that when a desire gets to such a point it's an imperative necessity.

Understand, I've nothing to say, beyond what I've said, and nothing to ask. It was nothing more or less than that I wanted to see you."

"Ah!" she exclaimed briefly. "You felt that?"

The question gave him a familiar touch of impatience.

"Of course I felt it. I've never ceased to feel it. Do you think one doesn't want to continue to feel such things? That what supports and consoles us can ever be as important as the fugitive flashes which are so wonderful and so transforming?" He paused abruptly. It had suddenly occurred to him how impossible it was to keep anything they said—even the most superficial exchange of words—from the inner significances to which she as well as he must still be sensitive.

He could see that her shoulders rose. "It is good of you to do what you say you have done—though, as I must admit to you, it is useless. I shall see Maître Duclos to-morrow and tell him so. And as for your desire to see me——" She stopped. Her hands had begun restlessly to clasp and unclasp each other. "But what possible good could it do?" She paused again, and then her voice broke suddenly with the sharpness of overstrained feeling. "Oh, why did you come? What is left to be said?"

In an instant her agitation seemed to Cushing to have placed them on an intimate footing. Her tone had the odd effect of transporting him across the intermediate months and back to their last interview. He had the strange sense that they might have parted the day before and might be meeting now with a thorough knowledge of how the intervening time had been spent. He

could see her growing nervousness and the rising pressure of her feeling.

"There was really no use!" she exclaimed. "You know about me all that you need to know. You could have written about the money; you could have said whatever you had to say—and I do not see that there is anything—in that way. No. I tell you frankly, I cannot see you—I cannot. As for regarding you as I regard other people, as for talking to you calmly, I can no more do it than——"

"Than you could talk calmly to Arthur Irish. Is that it?"

He had completed the sentence for her before he was aware of it; and his quick surprise at his indelicacy was effaced, an instant later, by his relief that they at last stood face to face with the innermost facts of which the air was so full.

She threw back her head and gave him for the first time a long clear look. "But he was so different!" was all she said.

"That's for you to say. So far as I go, the last thing I want is to wound you; you know that."

"Ah, do you think I have so completely forgotten you that you need say such things?" She made a sudden gesture. "But what possible good can all this do?"

Her question made Cushing realise that he must inevitably put the same question to himself. Now that he confronted her he felt that there could have been no excuse for his coming. Yet his instinct to catch the disputable point in a case held him for a moment. "When I last saw you—in the park—then you didn't mind so much," he suggested.

"Then!" she caught him up. "Ah, then I was more ignorant. No, no. It is useless for you and me to talk. I cannot meet you as I would meet other people. That is obvious, is it not? Forgive me, but it is much better that you should go. I am sure of it—quite sure of it." As she warmed she had again turned her face to the light; and as he saw more clearly the change in her he was reminded, with a swift appeal to his pity, of all the perplexing difficulties through which she must have passed and which must make the talk so much harder for her than for him. Her intervening experiences shaped themselves before him. He glanced around the room—at its formality, its shabbiness, its air of a civilisation ineffably old and ripe. It seemed to him to enclose her and to place her far from him, as the slight strain of her English showed her reversion to the constant use of French. His thoughts busied themselves for a moment with the inner conformities to her own code of which there were only the outward signs. "Do, I beg you," she reiterated, "forgive my feeling and go."

Cushing felt the importance of his pause. He was becoming more and more aware of the insuperable facts she had placed between them. It was above all distasteful to him to force his presence upon her. The logical sequence to so impulsive a proceeding was confronting him, and he supposed he could only accept the obvious sincerity of her words and leave her.

"Since you wish it, I suppose there's nothing else to be done." He stretched out his hand to the hat and gloves he had laid down. "I didn't think it would be like this: perhaps, after all that's happened, I was excusable in forgetting your sensitiveness. That's what is

so wonderful"—he felt that his irony played more on himself than on her—"to be so adventurous and yet so sensitive! I begin to feel that I owe you an apology for coming and for putting you through all this; but do you understand," he reflected again for a second, with his eyes steadily fixed on her, "do you understand that I couldn't help coming?"

She made a mute, vague motion with her head, and he saw that she raised one hand to her cheek, with what he remembered as the most nervous and uncertain of all her gestures.

"Perhaps with your sense of drama," he pursued—"you see I remember your sense of drama and your capacity to make one want to work up a scene"—he smiled again—"it may give you some satisfaction to know it. I suppose," he brought out irrelevantly, "that you're happy?"

She threw back her head, and the obscurity of the room was bridged in an instant by the vivid look she gave him. "Yes;" she said clearly; "but I have never—but never—been as happy as I was with you."

Cushing waited for a moment and then lowered his voice to say: "You mean except with Irish."

"I was happy then, yes; it was the greatest sympathy I shall ever know, that life and all those beautiful things. But it was not complete. It will not again be complete." Her voice dropped to the tone of his. "If you are frank about why you came, I too shall be frank. It was not complete with you. . . . But you know what it was. It was so vivid and alive! Even our quarrels, they were alive. *Voyons*, let us admit it; you and I are two of those people who can only be intensely happy or in-

tensely unhappy together. Our personalities work on each other that way. Yes. And just because our life together was so alive we cannot meet now. There it is. I regret that you came to-day except for that: I have told you the truth. I shall be happy, as I have been happy; but it will never be as beautiful as it was with you in those first days; no, never!"

"It's part of your code, I know, to recognise these obligations intellectually——" Cushing began, but he caught himself up. "Oh, why should I beg the question? If that's what you have to say to me, don't you know what I have to say to you? Don't you know what it has cost, to live without you?"

"Ah, it has cost so much!" she exclaimed quickly.

Cushing shrugged his shoulders. "I don't care to say what it's cost. I'm not a person who says those things. But I can tell you that if you'd wanted to come back to me——"

She again made a quick exclamation, and the note in which she uttered it caught him up so sharply that he took a step forward; for the first time it struck him as strange that they should be talking with the width of the room between them. "Well," he continued, "would you have come?"

"I think you must forget what has happened!"

"That's just what I don't forget. I remember everything."

There was a scarcely perceptible change to coldness in her tone. "Then you must forget what such an act would have cost me. For some time now my life has been *réglée*, established. I have not much money, it is true; but I have won for myself a comparative dignity,

and that—as you know—means more to me than money. If I had ever thought of such a thing—of such a horrible vulgarism as marriage with a man who had been my husband—no, but it would have cost me the opinion of the people to whom I belong and the opinion of everything I respect.”

“For the matter of that, it would have cost me, too; but what does cost mean, when one’s old enough to grant that everything pays for itself? And if you’d really wanted to come——!” He ended with a brief laugh. “If you’d really wanted to come, you know, you’d have thrown over everything—everything!”

“Ah, as if it had ever been possible!” she said hurriedly.

Cushing was conscious that he paused again, with the gravity of the issue as clear as daylight before him. “My dear, it has always been possible,” he declared.

Anne-Marie did not speak at once; and to his intense surprise Cushing saw that the attitude of acute strain in which she had heard him was gradually relaxing and giving way to an attitude of the deepest and gravest reflexion. The fact that she was so weighing his words gave him in a second a sense of reality in the situation which nothing else could have conveyed. Every inch of him sharpened to attention. His first instinct still was not to drive her. He would give her every chance—even to his determination not to take a step nearer her until, for one issue or the other, her decision was made. What impressed him most, in spite of what he himself had at stake, were the marks of feeling in her worn, refined face. He knew that his capacity for enthusiasm must have remained more intact than hers. Her gravity

and her evident realisation that they must stop to count all the hours they would have to live together proved that, and the conclusion stirred his former tenderness for her. His jealousy of her experiences of the past two years and of every slightest trace of them in her was softened, and he thought only of what she must have endured and of how exposed and desolate she must have been. "There have been things which have been too hard for us both," he heard himself adding, "but if you did come, if you would consent——"

"You really mean it? But do you understand all it would involve? No!" She struck her hands together. "It would be too outrageous!"

He made an impatient gesture. "Haven't we the right to be outrageous?"

"I thought so once; yes! But I know better now. To you it does not seem so important, perhaps. To me—ah, it is the consistency of my dignity, the consistency I owe my traditions, which is important. I know now what divorce stands for—that it is nothing less than a loss of that consistency. And this—but it would be too extraordinary!"

"And do you think consistency is happiness? Do you think"—he gave a quick look around him—"do you think it can ever count as much as the things one can't actually count but which one feels?"

She met his eyes uncertainly for an instant. Then, still in a low eager tone, she exclaimed: "Oh, it would be utterly impossible! And for you too! If it would be a scandal for me—and one cannot sustain too many scandals—it would be a scandal of a certain sort for you; no, but I know it! To try to make me acceptable

again, in your *milieu*—that would involve a scandal.” She paused, and he could feel the effort she was making for frankness. “I will admit it to you: I have learned too well that no feeling, even the very best, can withstand such a test—the test of having defied consistency. This, in its way, would be such a defiance. I see it—with every inch of my experience I know it! Ah, no, no, no! I tell you it is impossible!”

A latent recollection kept Cushing silent for a moment. He was remembering the night when, as he sat beside her dressing table and watched her tentative face, he had had revealed to him not only the extent of her unhappiness but also the baffling blend in her of what was finest with what was undeniably lacking in fineness. The memory and its suggestions seemed to have risen in his mind in time to warn him of the compromises he would have to make with those elements in her which he knew were unchangeable. He shook his head and smiled. “Well, whatever you decide, this is clear: if you come back, you’ve got to want to come back enough to be willing to do it well, to make the necessary readjustments.” His smile held as he pursued, with a swift recollection of the appearance she had presented that night, “I should have mine to make too, you know.”

She continued to gaze at him. In some indefinable way Cushing understood that if she were thinking, with the impatience she had always shown, that such an idealist of sentiment as he was after all incurable, it was none the less this assurance which, in her confused life, it had cost her most to live without. Her look at him even admitted this, though at the same time it admitted her knowledge that, in their first difference, they would fall

into their former phrases of disagreement. He could see that with all the adroitness her experience had taught her she was comparing the cost and credit of the conditions of the case and of her feeling for him. If she yielded—and suddenly it seemed to him to be the measure of what that feeling must be—she would do so not because she disregarded the smallest element of what composed their future, but because she was ready to defy her hardly attained wisdom. For a moment more she faltered; then she turned and dropped into the nearest chair, and he heard her exclaim: “But how could I ever have believed, from the first, that any other ending was possible? That terrible America! It has ruined my sense of expediency!”

THE END

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